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Mark Pearsall

University of Connecticut, mark.pearsall@uconn.edu

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indigni et peccatoris verbum: Christian Identity in the Epistula Severi

Mark R. Pearsall, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2016

The *Epistula Severi* provides an account of the conversion of the Jews on the island of Minorca in February, 418. According to the letter, the Christians were inflamed with religious fervor as a result of the arrival of certain relics of St. Stephen the Protomartyr shortly earlier. As a result, they rallied under the leadership of their bishop, Severus, and attempted to engage the Jews of Magona, the primary city on the island, in a debate and convince them to join the Christian church. The Jews, according to Severus, refused to debate and began stockpiling weapons to defend themselves against the threat of potential violence. The Christians marched to the synagogue to search for weapons and a riot broke out between the two groups. Eventually, fearing their destruction, the Jews yielded to the Christians and converted. After minimal resistance and a few minor miracles, all five hundred and forty Jewish inhabitants of the island became Christian.

Unlike previous scholarship which sought to determine the authenticity or historicity of the letter, I will examine its narrative elements. Employing rhetorical narrative criticism, I will show how the author develops a totalizing discourse of imperial Christianity that seeks to absorb and erase Jewish history. Rhetorical narrative criticism studies the elements of a narrative to explore the ways in which the author shapes the telling for an intended purpose. Although forced conversion was illegal when the letter was written, the author communicates to his audience a model for encouraging conversion which conceals the violence employed. He does this by developing an image of Christian and Jewish identities which pits them against one another. Miracles, dreams, and even geography are employed to show divine involvement in the conflict, supporting the Christians in their actions and vexing the Jews until they adopt Christian practices.

indigni et peccatoris verbum:
Christian Identity in the *Epistula Severi*

Mark R. Pearsall

B.A., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1991

M.A.T., Boston University, 1993

A Dissertation

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Requirements for the Degree of

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at the

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

indigni et peccatoris verbum: Christian Identity in the *Epistula Severi*

Presented by

Mark R. Pearsall, B.A., M.A.T.

Major Advisor _____
Daniel Caner

Associate Advisor _____
Sara Johnson

Associate Advisor _____
Stuart Miller

University of Connecticut
2016

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Acknowledgments

This has been a long journey of exploration. While it formally began over a decade ago, it really had begun long before that. As a teacher of Classics at Glastonbury High School, I found myself constantly challenge to increase my knowledge of ancient culture and history. I tried to teach students to make connections between their learning and their own lives. They challenged me to show them how. This provided me with the impetus and enthusiasm to continue to search for the influence of the past on our present. Likewise, my mentors, Dorothy Joba and Carlene Craib, taught me to question everything. What was important? What could we learn from it? What was the purpose or the result? How do we know? I hope that I can emulate the clarity of thought and pursuit of wisdom that I admire in them.

The Medieval Studies Department at the University of Connecticut became a second home for me. I was an anomaly for the department because of my concentration on the earliest periods of medievalism. I am thankful for the support of Bob Hasenfratz who recognized the value of ensuring all aspects of the field were represented. He made a point to welcome me early in my studies and encouraged me to find my niche. That inevitably led me to ties with History and later the Literatures, Cultures, and Languages Department.

Daniel Caner, professor in both departments, became my chief advisor. I cannot thank him enough for the guidance and support he has given me throughout. Both inspiring and practical, he provided me with the mixture of hope and realism that are the balancing act of doctoral research. He had a keen sense for knowing when I needed to be reminded of my strengths and my limitations and how to work with both. I would not have been able to complete this task without his understanding and support.

My other advisors, Sara Johnson and Stuart Miller, were equally important in the process. I can say I truly enjoyed all of the classes I took with them, either as requirements for the degree or out of personal interest or admiration for their scholarship and teaching. Sara and Stuart furthermore encouraged me by the long discussions and conversations we had over the years. Like Dan, they are experts in their fields, true scholars. They were always available for consultation and equally willing to sit and just chat. I do not know if it is the same for all graduate students but I feel happy knowing that my advisors have become and will remain friends.

Finally, the greatest support through this entire process has come from my husband, Paul Trubey. He has endured the countless hours over the years in which I was cloistered in my study or at the library, researching and writing. While the burdens of the house and farm increasingly fell to him, he never complained. When I had moments of doubt about my ability to finish, he comforted and encouraged me. In many ways, he has worked as hard for this as I have.

I would like to dedicate this work to my late mother, Miriam Pearsall. She has always been the model to me for perseverance and willpower. She encouraged in me (and my siblings) intellectual curiosity and a love of reading. She delighted in discussing history and storytelling with us when we were children. And she always encouraged my fantasy and science fiction gaming because she saw the value in imagination and creativity. I believe she would be pleased.

Introduction

The *Epistula Severi* provides an account of the conversion of the Jews on the island of Minorca in February, 418. The letter was circulated and survived among documents associated with St. Stephen the Protomartyr. Although the author claims the saint's relics were instrumental in initiating the events he describes, the letter is not hagiographical. In fact, the relics play a surprisingly small role in the story. Interpretation of the letter has confounded scholars because of concerns of authenticity and historicity. The issue of authenticity has effectively been resolved through Bradbury's research on the letter.¹ Scholars now are beginning rightly to move away from concerns about the historicity of the conversion of Jews on the island and instead explore what the letter can reveal about identity, religion, and gender in Late Antiquity. This, in turn, has allowed scholars to focus on the text as something besides a historical letter. Regarding historical fiction in antiquity, Perry notes:

Here we must repeat that throughout the formal prose literature of antiquity, exclusive of the romance and the traditionally comic or mimic genres, what we call fiction or story is conceived either as history or as the recording of presumably actual occurrences. In this fashionable environment, moreover, from the standpoint of dramatic development, a story is always depressed by being subordinated to something else, either to the larger framework of a history, within which it is only one incident, or to a philosophical idea which it serves to illustrate.²

In this light, the letter should be considered a historical, fictional narrative. The story it tells is influenced in its telling by the motives of the author and thus reflects his philosophical beliefs and ideological goals. I will employ rhetorical narrative criticism to examine the discourse of the narrative. Through this analysis, I will show that the *Epistula Severi* is an early example of anti-Jewish propaganda that reflects the embrace of violence as a means of conversion. I will also

¹ Bradbury 1996

² Perry 1967: 70

examine how it promotes a totalizing discourse for an imperial, Christian identity that seeks to erase Jewish history from its past.

Late Antiquity and the *Epistula Severi*

This strange document presents a rare view of the dynamic and changing world of Late Antiquity. The fifth century was born out of radical changes in the Roman Empire, especially in the west. The disruption of the third century had been followed by the stabilizing events of the fourth, marked by governmental reforms and economic recovery. “Barbarians” continued to plague the borders while at the same time they assimilated and became part of the population. The center of power had moved east to Constantinople and Christianity had changed from a marginalized and persecuted minority to an accepted norm with growing power, influenced by bishops who were members of the elite aristocracy and ruled like government officials. The transformation to state religion brought about more overt conflict with “pagans” and Jews. Theological wrangling continued among Christians themselves to determine orthodoxy and the emperors were frequently involved in church politics. The result was a totalizing discourse, produced by Christians in their attempts to define their identity, which left no room for deviation.

Christianity generated new sites of the articulation of the boundary between the self-styled majority (the new Christian commonwealth) and its minorities, be they pagans, Jews, barbarians, heretics, or Samaritans. The process of domesticating a newly empowered creed involved the neutralization of other creeds and of other people. To graft its rituals over the rich panoply of paganism and Judaism, late ancient Christianity spawned a political discourse that set minorities apart from the rest of humanity. The vision of a universal-imperial Christianity entailed the vanquishing, or at least the silencing, of the bearers of difference.³

As Christians asserted their new power and struggled to formalize their relationship with the rest of society the conflicts which arose were often violent and deadly.

³ Sivan 2013: 121

Our interpretation of these events, however, is colored by their recording. The sources which present these conflicts were mostly Christians who sought to define themselves in opposition to (perceived) other groups. In most cases, these other groups were not interested in the same delineation of identity because they did not perceive or acknowledge them. There was no monolithic organization which called itself “pagan.” While there were some elite, pagan philosophers who argued against Christian theology, there was no unified resistance because pagans were not a collective whole.⁴ The modern assumption that there was arises from the success of the Christians in creating their own identity.

The formation and contestation of identity are fundamentally about power, the power to represent. In late antiquity the barbarians were barbarised, the East orientalised, non-Christians paganised because they could be subjected to such categorisations without their voices being heard or their ideas known.⁵

Equally complex is the depiction of Jews in Christian discourse. Anti-Jewish, Christian texts can be traced back as early as the Gospels. Vehement attacks against Jews continued to be written during the third century and really increased in the fourth in texts written by Christian writers like Chrysostom.

The resulting explosion of Christian debate led to heated exchanges of anti-Jewish accusations between warring individuals and doctrinal camps. Thus Athanasius condemned his Arian enemies in a conflict over the date of Easter; thus Faustus, the great spokesman for Latin Manichaeism, condemned catholic Christians; thus Jerome condemned Augustine in a debate over how to read Galatians; thus Chrysostom criticized members of his own congregation when they fraternized too closely with local Jews.⁶

⁴ I have made reference in a few sentences to the vast area of identity studies in Late Antiquity. This is a vibrant and current area of research among scholars which covers a multifaceted field from individual and group identities to theories of history itself. In the wake of the development of transitional theories about Late Antiquity (i.e. that the period is better seen as a transition between Classical and Medieval studies than as a decline and fall from Ancient Rome, à la Gibbons) there have emerged numerous studies on barbarians, pagans, and Jews. Since the *Epistula* does not mention barbarians and pagans, I will not discuss them in this study. However, the parallel development of discourses about them is an important comparison to be considered in this context. Further discussion can be found in Bowerstock, Brown, Cameron, Heather, McLynn, Salzman, and Wells to name just a few.

⁵ Miles 1999: 5

⁶ Fredericksen 2008: 253

Likewise an increase in anti-Jewish rhetoric also appeared in legal documents at this time: “Rhetorical anti-Judaism post-Constantine also metastasized into a new cultural area: Roman imperial law, which came to constitute its own sort of literature *adversus Iudaeos*.”⁷ And yet, Jews also held a special place in Christian origins which marked them out as unique. Without the Jews, after all, there could be no Christianity. Therefore, Jews had become a somewhat protected class even as they were put down as wrong-believers and Christ-killers.

What generalizations about social relations between Christians and Jews can we draw from these inconsistent data? Were the fourth and fifth centuries the best of times or the worst of times? Both, I think. Conditions varied depending on the locale and on the temperament of the particular bishop. Where there was violence, there was most often a bishop directing its flow. We know of some dozen episodes throughout the empire in these years when Christian mobs either destroyed or appropriated synagogue buildings. Yet in this same period, throughout the empire, we have incontrovertible evidence of close and friendly Christian-Jewish relations.⁸

In the fifth century, Christian discourse developed an imperialistic element that included the metaphorical conquering of Jewish spaces and revision of Jewish history as Christian holy spaces.⁹ It has been suggested that the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity grew in frequency in this time.¹⁰ While laws, including the Theodosian Code, and some church leaders, like Augustine, were opposed to violence against Jews and explicitly forbade destruction of their property and synagogues, violence nonetheless became common later in the fifth century. As historians, we are left to wonder about the reality of the situation in the beginning of the fifth century. Did this movement toward forced conversion of the Jews begin slowly at the start of the century or was it a new phenomenon which appeared suddenly later? Is there evidence in

⁷ Fredericksen 2013: 254

⁸ Fredericksen 2013: 257

⁹ Jacobs 2003 also discusses this at length in *Remains of the Jews*.

¹⁰ Dilley (2010: 610) notes, “Religious zeal as a justification for violence is an ideology with roots in the martyr tradition, used frequently in this period by monks and others who attempt to convert unreceptive or hostile audiences. Although Severus professes his brotherly concern for the Jews’ salvation, and does not claim to be deliberately seeking martyrdom, his appeal to zeal puts him in the context of extra-legal extremist violence, despite his protests to the contrary.”

historical documents that shows where or when this discourse began? The documentation is fragmentary, especially in the west and in remote places in the Empire. While it does not give concrete proof of actual violence against the Jews, the *Epistula Severi* is important for us in suggesting the early development of this discourse.

The *Epistula Severi* in Historical Context

The *Epistula Severi* was composed during the troubled period at the start of the fifth century. Rome had recently been sacked by Alaric, and the Visigoths were infiltrating the West, including the Iberian Peninsula. Christianity had gained the upper hand in the empire in religious and political power. The rise in prominence of the bishops as religious and political figures altered the landscape, creating multiple regional centers of power outside of the capitals at Rome and Constantinople. The struggles in Christianity to define itself in the new order had created rifts between religious factions. This in turn led to conflicts between orthodoxy and perceived heresies. Judaism also came under fire because of its special role in the history of Christianity. Living in harmony with Christians in some places and openly attacked by them elsewhere, the volatile relationship was uneasy and vulnerable to the changing loyalties of the political world.

The remains of St. Stephen, the Protomartyr, were discovered outside Jerusalem in December 418. A cult to Stephen predated the finding of his burial spot¹¹ but was not of any special significance. The presence of his relics was first revealed to a priest named Lucian in a series of visions. The discovery was politically convenient for John, the bishop of Jerusalem, who was enmeshed in theological and political wrangling.

¹¹ Bovon 2003: 282

The discovery of Stephen's relics came at an opportune moment for Bishop John, who in late 415 was mired in the dispute concerning the teaching of the British monk Pelagius, whose views on grace, free will, and original sin brought him into sharp conflict with Augustine and Catholic orthodoxy. The Pelagian controversy brought together a remarkable array of personalities in the Holy Land in 415. Pelagius himself had arrived in Palestine in about 411 and had found favour with Bishop John. But he also found in Jerome an adversary as formidable as Augustine.¹²

John himself is reported to have led the exploration party that sought the relics and, upon finding them, to have interpreted the inscription upon the tomb. Miracles immediately ensued. First there was an earth tremor when the bones were exhumed and "a fragrance issued from the crypt such as none of them had ever experienced and which made them think of the sweetness of paradise."¹³ This was followed by the sudden healing of seventy-three people which occurred during the first hour after the disinterment of the relics.¹⁴

We know about the finding of St. Stephen's relics and the subsequent miraculous events because they were recorded by Lucian. His account, known as the *Epistula Luciani* or *Revelatio Sancti Stephani*, was dictated in Greek and then translated into Latin by Avitus, a Spanish priest who was in Jerusalem at the same time. That version was widely disseminated in the West and comes down to us in the *Patrologia Latina* (PL 41.805-54) with other documents related to St. Stephen, including the *Epistula Severi*. It is one of two important documents written about Stephen immediately after his relics were discovered. The other is an account of the martyr's life known as the *Passio Sancti Stephani*. This does not survive in Latin or Greek but a copy has been found in Georgian with the *Revelatio*.¹⁵ It has been claimed that the two works were produced at the suggestion of John, Bishop of Jerusalem, for political purposes.¹⁶ They both

¹² Bradbury 1996: 20

¹³ Bradbury 1996: 19

¹⁴ Bradbury 1996: 19

¹⁵ Bradbury 1996: 16

¹⁶ Bradbury (1996: 16) notes that this was claimed by Michael van Esbroeck (see footnote 29)

contain anti-Jewish elements that link them thematically. John made use of the relics to promote his agenda against Judaizers after the bones were relocated to Jerusalem.

The problem for many bishops was precisely that the two groups, Jews and Christians, often refused to remain distinct, and John's outburst about Stephen's 'wars' against the Jews may betray indirect criticism of Judaizing tendencies among the local Christians who lived in a heavily Jewish environment. Stephen's relics and the development of his cult may have been useful to John in his dealings both with local Jews and with Judaizing Christians in his own congregation.¹⁷

The popularity of Stephen's cult grew rapidly, especially in the West. This was aided by Avitus who was given some of the relics by Lucian.

Lucian himself appropriated some of the remains, which he gave to Avitus, a Spanish refugee priest in Palestine. Avitus in turn sent them and a Latin translation of Lucian's tale to Bishop Balchonius of Braga; bones and letter were to be delivered by Paulus Orosius, returning to the West after the council of Diospolis.¹⁸

Orosius was another Spanish priest who happened to be in Jerusalem. He had gone from Spain to Africa "to consult with Augustine about Origenism and Priscillianism"¹⁹ and subsequently was sent by Augustine to Jerome in Jerusalem. After partaking in the church councils there, he returned to North Africa with the *Revelatio* letter and Stephen's relics before setting out to bring them to Spain. He stopped in Minorca en route but then returned to Africa without arriving in Spain, presumably because of the dangers posed by the violence in Spain at the time.²⁰ He deposited some of the relics at the cathedral in Minorca before he left. The remaining relics he brought back to North Africa and they ended up in Uzalis. In both locations, the relics were associated with miracles. "On Minorca their power converted Jews. At Uzalis, the bishop, Evodius, described the many miracles they effected, including the cure of the noblewoman

¹⁷ Bradbury 1996: 20

¹⁸ Clark 1982: 142

¹⁹ Bradbury 1996: 21

²⁰ Bradbury 1996: 23-24

Megetia, whose jaw had been dislocated by intense nausea during her pregnancy.”²¹ Thus two rather remote locations became centers of power in their own ways by association with the relics. But Stephen’s influence reached other places as well.

The *Revelatio* of Stephen's relics provoked a fulgurant interest in the Protomartyr. The fact that Paul Orosius and Avitus brought some of his relics to the West encouraged this enthusiasm: North Africa became a land where Stephen was venerated, and places like Uzalis, Carthage, and Hippo became famous for the miracles performed by the holy martyr. The same was true of the Mediterranean island of Minorca; of Rome, where Stephen has been connected to Saint Laurence; and of Ancona, where Augustine knew that an elbow of the saint was preserved. Ravenna, Naples, and Milan also had their churches dedicated to Saint Stephen. The same can be said of Spain, France, and England. The cathedral of Besançon was proud to possess an arm of Stephen.²²

Such popularity in cultic worship naturally was accompanied by the proliferation and dissemination of stories about the saint. The *Revelatio* was perhaps the most popular, especially in the western empire where it was widely read. “The *Revelatio* was widely disseminated in the Latin West, often circulating with a group of works, including the *Epistula Severi*, which described the circumstances of the discovery of Stephen's relics, their dispersal, and the miracles produced by them.”²³ There was also an increase in the number of sermons with Stephen as their theme. Some of these were by Augustine himself.

Augustine preached several times on the first martyr. We have the *Sermones* 314-19 on Stephen and the *Sermones* 320-24 on the miracles performed by the presence of the relics. As mentioned before, Augustine encouraged those of his parishioners who were healed by the power of the relics to tell their stories. Such *libelli* are known indirectly, but at least one of them is preserved in one of Augustine's sermons.²⁴

²¹ Clark 1982: 142-143

²² Bovon 2003: 287

²³ Bradbury 1996: 17

²⁴ Bovon 2003: 290

Evodius additionally encouraged his parishioners to record the miracles they witnessed about the saint. Augustine even mentions some in *De Civitate Dei*.²⁵ While healing and driving out demons figures predominantly in these miracle stories, only in the *Epistula Severi* is there a conversion of Jews. What accounts for the difference in that miracle story? The answer must be sought with the authors.

Little is known about Severus of Minorca apart from his role in the conversion of the Jews in 418. The information we have comes mostly from his letter describing the events. As I will discuss elsewhere, there is reason to be skeptical about the self-portrait he creates in his account. In fact, as Bradbury shows, there is a strong case to be made that the *Epistula Severi* was co-authored by Severus and Consentius rather than by Severus alone. Consentius himself mentions in a letter to Augustine that he was consulted by Severus on a few words,²⁶ but Bradbury shows that there are many patterns of similarity to Consentius' style in his other writing.²⁷ The imagery, verbal echoes, and thematic patterns which Bradbury examines clearly show a similarity between Severus' letter and Consentius' work. It is important to understand that the letter is a collaborative effort when considering its historical context. Indeed, there is reason to believe that Augustine's opposition to the use of force against the Jews shaped the way in which Consentius and Severus approached the writing of the *Epistula Severi*.

Consentius was a theologian from Spain who moved to the Balearic Islands, of which Minorca is one, in the early fifth century to escape the mounting tensions in the Iberian

²⁵ Bovon 2003: 304

²⁶ Frederickson (2008: 247-248) quotes, " 'Certain miraculous things,' Consentius explains to Augustine, 'were performed among us at the bidding of the Lord. When the blessed priest, the brother of your Paternity, Bishop Severus, along with others who had been present, recounted these things to me, he broke down my resolution [Consentius had resolved not to essay literary compositions] by the great force of his love, and he borrowed from me some words and phrases—no more than that—so that he could write a letter that contained the narrative of these events' " (*Letters* 12.13.5–6)

²⁷ Bradbury 1996: 57-69

Peninsula. Consentius is an established historical figure from his correspondence with the bishop of Hippo.²⁸

On the Balearic Islands, in contrast, barbarian invasions had not troubled Consentius; instead, he had continued to live the life of leisure and isolation for which he had retired to these islands in the first place (12.6.2). While barbarians were threatening much of Britain, Gaul and Spain, Consentius was acquiring copies of Augustine's *Confessions* and other works (12.1.1).²⁹

Consentius considered himself to be an intellectual and had ambitions of promoting his own policies. He was self-assured enough to criticize Augustine for what he perceived to be faults in his beliefs. However, he also admits in their correspondence that he had not read a lot of Augustine's works (e.g. the *Confessions* lay unread on his book shelf for seven or eight years).³⁰ This has led to harsh criticism from modern scholars: "Consentius likewise was an insignificant theologian whose attempts to participate in, or even comprehend, these religious trends revealed both his isolation and his intellectual incompetence."³¹ Whether this is an accurate characterization or not, he certainly tried to persuade Augustine that the use of coercion was an appropriate and acceptable means of dealing with heretics and Jews.

Consentius had written to Augustine, partly about the virtues of using force (and subterfuge) against heretics (Letter 11), and partly about his role in shaping Severus' letter on "Stephen's" conversion of Minorca's Jews (Letter 12). A hard pragmatism underlay Consentius' words: The church, he believed, should avail itself of coercion, because coercion worked.³²

²⁸ Augustine, *Letters* 119-120, and 205; additionally, letters 11 and 12, most recently discovered, mention the occurrences on Minorca described in the *Epistula Severi*.

²⁹ Van Dam 1986: 525. The citations are from Augustine's letters.

³⁰ Augustine, *Letters* 12.16.3

³¹ Van Dam 1986: 526

³² Fredericksen 2008: 361

To a certain extent, it is logical that Consentius would think Augustine might support using force against the Jews. After all, Augustine had shown himself to be fully capable of employing violence against heretics. But he did not feel the same way about the Jews.

Augustine's own theological rationale in defense of religious coercion—that the loving effort to save Donatist souls, otherwise lost, not only justified the use of force, but morally obligated the Christian leaders of both church and state to use such force—could easily have been extended to embrace the Jews as well. But Augustine never moved in the slightest degree in this direction. His embrace of the coercive power of the state against pagans, his advocacy of that force against Donatist Christians, and his voluble defense of his position on this question of force, could not contrast more sharply with his position on Jewish contemporaries.³³

The difference of opinion between the two seems to be less about the use of force than about when and how to use it. Consentius shows himself capable of resorting to almost any tactics to get his way. He openly attacked Augustine in one of his letters³⁴ and encouraged treachery in Spain as a means of gaining the upper hand. This led to a strong rebuke by Augustine. He wrote a treatise against Consentius for his actions and influence over Fronto, another Spanish priest, who was embroiled in a shady attack against suspected heretics. This treatise, *Contra Mendacium*, rails against the immoral practices that Consentius employed to prove his case and force his beliefs on his enemies. Interestingly, the central issue was not a question of orthodoxy or the use of force but rather the deceptive way in which Consentius pursued his goal. “But Augustine could not pass over Consentius' lack of scruples, and his response to the account of Fronto's activities in Ep. 11 was a treatise, not on heresy, but on mendacity.”³⁵

³³ Fredericksen 2008: 363

³⁴ Van Dam (1986: 531) reports, “Augustine also did not respond to Consentius' slighting remarks about his writings, nor to Consentius' blunt proposal that Augustine encourage a more heavyhanded response to heretics in Spain than he had to the Donatists: by appearing to tolerate schism, Consentius wrote, North Africa 'fornicates in public' (11.26.2).

³⁵ Van Dam 1986: 531

It is obvious from the details that Augustine and Consentius simply did not agree on the philosophical understanding of the difference between pagans, Christian heretics, and Jews. Augustine was able to perceive differences in beliefs and practices while Consentius lumped everyone together as unorthodox and therefore in need of reform by any means. Augustus had advocated the use of violence against the Donatists in North Africa. But he does not seem to have believed in a one-size-fits-all approach for everyone who disagreed with him. Consentius, and likewise Severus, was more limited in his view.

Severus' justification for coercing the Jews of Magona sounded very like Augustine's justification for coercing the Donatists of North Africa: By compelling these intimate outsiders in, bishops could help them to take an essential step toward their ultimate redemption. But for the full course of his long episcopate, Augustine never advocated extending such muscular pastoral care to current Jewish communities.³⁶

This could be viewed as a lack of sophistication on the part of Consentius and Severus. Lacking the subtlety and erudition of Augustine, they were incapable of recognizing the cultural and theological underpinnings of Judaism or the historical reasons for which it held a special place in prior Christian (and indeed Roman) thought. It could also be the result of a changing attitude that was developing among the less elite in society. Still looking toward the traditional or established men of power for guidance and approval, Consentius and Severus were nonetheless willing to pursue their own manner of achieving their goals.

Augustine treated this Priscillianist doctrine as an intellectual problem, acknowledged its derivative nature and ignored it. But Consentius, who anyway lacked the intellectual competence to refute Priscillianism, could not maintain such an attitude of lofty scorn; he could only try to stamp out this alleged heresy, even if his techniques included mendacity. These different responses to the same theological teaching suggest that modern historians also need a more differentiated analysis of the impact of Christian doctrine. For although our academic sympathy is instinctively with Augustine's

³⁶ Fredericksen 2008: 363

intellectual dismissal, Consentius' confused thinking and harsh reaction were perhaps more characteristic of late Antiquity.³⁷

Whether it was a developing trend or not, however, it is clear that Augustine had a different approach than Consentius and Severus both in his treatment of the Jews and the way in which he made use of St. Stephen's relics. He delivered sermons about the martyr, built a sanctuary in his honor, and celebrated his miracles. But his focus was only on the healing power of the saint. He makes no association with the relics and the conversion of Jews.

In contrast to what he does say in favor of repressing "false religion" and of disciplining "false" Christians, we have what he does not say to or about those Catholics who would coerce Jews. He never praises Consentius. He never praises Severus. So far as we know, he never read Severus' letter aloud to his congregation in Hippo, as his fellow bishop had read it to the church in Uzalis. Augustine, too, had dedicated a chapel to Stephen in Hippo, where the saintly dust also made miracles. When Augustine reviewed the details of these miracles, he dwelt upon the saint's healings, exorcisms, and acts of charity: No *contra Iudaeos* theme sounds (*City of God* 22.8). Stephen, for Augustine, inspired no missionary effort directed at Hippo's Jews.³⁸

What then can explain the miraculous power of conversion that Stephen seemed to show on Minorca? Given the mendacious nature of at least one of the authors of the *Epistula Severi*, can we accept the document as factual at all? The authenticity of the letter appears to be secure but what about its historicity? Did the Jews on Minorca in fact convert? I do not think we can answer that question in any definitive way. At this point, there are no other documents that clearly corroborate Severus' account. The archeology of the island is also unclear. Remains have been found which indicate a thriving Jewish population was in existence and the remains of cathedrals have also been discovered. But they do not allow us to say what happened to the Jewish population that was there.

³⁷ Van Dam 1986: 532

³⁸ Fredericksen 2008: 362-363

On the other hand, it is evident that something occurred. We do not have any evidence, in Augustine or elsewhere, that calls into question the events that Severus describes. We know for a fact that his letter was circulated with the *Revelatio Sancti Stephani* and the various miracle stories from North Africa. At no point did anyone accuse Severus of deceit in the way Augustine accused Consentius when he learned of his instigation of Fronto's behavior in Spain. It is therefore likely that Severus, upon becoming bishop, used the opportunity of the advent of Stephen's relics to stir up zeal against the Jews on the island. He likely used force, threats, and bribery to persuade them to convert. We have no idea what conversion in this context actually meant other than swearing some kind of oath of loyalty to the church. We also do not know if there were consequences for those who refused or did not remain Christian in any sense of the word. There is simply no further evidence to provide information to us.

And yet we cannot believe the letter to be factual as written. The events described in it are too far-fetched in some cases and the bias is conspicuous. Why, then, would Severus (and Consentius) choose to relate their account in such a manner? By now, it is obvious that Minorca had close ties with North Africa. Avitus and Orosius both made their way through the Balearics to consult with Augustine before they went to Jerusalem. After his failed attempt to return to Spain via Minorca, Orosius returned once more to North Africa. The relics that were not left in Minorca were brought instead to the North African city of Uzalis. And Consentius directed much of his correspondence to Augustine for both discussion and approval. It was, therefore, North Africa and not Rome or Constantinople that was the center of power for the islands. There is little mention or indication of Roman authority on Minorca, especially in the letter. Yet it is apparent that Severus does not see himself as free from all oversight. He mentions in the letter

that the city is under Roman authority.³⁹ As such, it would be as unwise for him to break any laws as it would be for the Jews whom he reminds in the letter: as I have stated elsewhere, violence against Jews was forbidden in the Theodocian Code. Their decisions also must have been influenced by having Augustine as one of the leading authorities in the Church to whom they answered. It was in their best interest to obfuscate any sense of overt coercion.

Paulus Orosius' arrival on the island was exactly the kind of distraction they needed. Carrying with him the relics of the saint and the *Revelatio*, written with political gain in mind, Orosius provided Severus with both an incentive and a means to embark on his mission. The story of the miraculous discovery of the saint's remains and the subsequent miracles which followed were now available to Severus and the Christian inhabitants of Minorca. Furthermore, John of Jerusalem had already shown that Stephen could be useful in combating Jews and Judaizers. Finally, the production of a letter and its circulation to confirm the miracles which had occurred was a clever way to remove any hint of malicious intent from the authors.

Neither Severus nor Consentius has left us a document which explains what they were thinking when they wrote the letter. Until we find other evidence to confirm or contradict what we know, we must accept the most plausible explanation of what happened based on the evidence that survives. Since that is the letter itself, we must turn to its words with a critical eye. It is important to remember that the authors had a purpose in mind when they wrote it. Discovering that purpose is the goal of rhetorical narrative criticism.

³⁹ *in civitate Romanis legibus subdita* (12.8)

Contents of the *Epistula Severi*

The *Epistula Severi* is a narrative account, in the form of a letter, of events on the island of Minorca during the Bishopric of Severus. According to the letter, the Christians on the island were inflamed with religious fervor as a result of the arrival of certain relics of St. Stephen the Protomartyr shortly before. As a result, they rallied under the leadership of their bishop, Severus, and confronted the Jews of Magona, the primary city on the island. Eventually, fearing their destruction, the Jews yielded to the Christians and converted. After minimal resistance and a few minor miracles, all five hundred and forty Jewish inhabitants of the island became Christian.

Severus provides a first-hand account of the events. He begins with a description of the island's geography including the locations of its two principal cities on opposite shores. The city in which he presides, Jamona, is free of Jewish inhabitants while the other city, Magona, has a thriving Jewish population. In fact, the Jews were so well established in Magona that the governing citizens themselves were Jewish. Most recognized and respected among them was Theodorus. While peace existed between the two cultures, Severus saw it to be ultimately destructive. As evidence, he provides examples of dreams which certain Christians and Jews (including by Theodorus and Severus himself) had which indicated God's will that the Jews convert.

The arrival of the saint's relics stirred up passion among the Christians to convert the Jews. Therefore Severus and a large group of Christians from Jamona set out to confront the Jews in Magona. They swiftly traveled across the width of the island and summoned the Jews to a debate. When the Jews refused to meet, Severus forced them. Accusations of wrongdoing and general misunderstanding led to an agreement to go to the synagogue to prove that the Jews were not stockpiling weapons there. Along the way, a fight broke out when some Jewish women threw

stones at the procession. Although no one (except a slave who was planning theft) was hurt in the subsequent riot, the synagogue burned down. The Jews were able to salvage the silver from the ruins and the Christians took possession of the scriptures for safekeeping. On the next day the first Jew, a man named Reuben, converted.

Several days later, Theodorus and a contingent of his followers met with Severus for a public debate. Although Theodorus was clearly winning the arguments, he lost the day when another riot erupted. In the confusion, the Jews mistakenly believed that Theodorus had converted and they began to flee in panic, abandoning their leader. Reuben then confronted Theodorus and tried to convince him to convert. Theodorus yielded after ensuring a few days as respite to get his affairs in order before making his conversion public.

From this point on, the letter details examples of other conversions and the miracles which encouraged them. First it tells of Meletius and Innocentius who fled from the city to seek solace in a cave but later returned and converted after facing their fear and finding no way to avoid it. Next were the conversions of Galilaeus, a young Jew, and Caecilianus and his brother, two town leaders. They declared at a public gathering that they feared for their lives and so had decided it was better to become Christian. This in turn produced a series of mass conversions by other Jews. More conversions occurred after a miraculous light appeared in the sky over the cathedral. The light was seen all over the island and thus had far reaching effect. Likewise, a rain of honey was a miraculous impetus for more conversions, including an unnamed Jewish elder and a group of travelers who were sailing past the island but were forced to land by a storm at sea. Finally, Theodorus himself publically acknowledged his own conversion.

The remaining unconverted Jews were women. Specifically mentioned are Artemesia, Meletius' wife, and Innocentius' wife and her sister. The former retired to her country home

rather than convert until she encountered the miraculous transformation of her well water to honey. This convinced her to return to the city and become Christian. Innocentius' wife locked herself in her home and refused to listen to her husband while her sister boarded a ship to escape the island. Eventually Innocentius' wife was worn down by her husband and the throng of Christians who besieged her house with prayers. Her sister also converted after a storm forced her ship to return to Minorca.

Having related the tales of conflict and conversion, Severus closes the letter with a plea to other Christians to take up the same zeal and bring the Jews worldwide into the fold.

Overview of scholarship on the *Epistula Severi*

The letter survived and was preserved among other manuscripts which document the miracles associated with St. Stephen. For much of recent history, the letter was assumed to be either useless to historians because of its hagiographic nature or even a forgery from a later date. The earliest studies of the *Epistula* focused on the authenticity of the letter and questioned whether it had been written in the fifth century or if it was a seventh century imitation. Blumenkrantz was the primary proponent of the argument for a later date. Using linguistic and archeological evidence, others, including Amengual i Batle questioned Blumenkrantz's findings and argued for the earlier date. That question seems to have been settled, however, after the discovery of a series of letters between St. Augustine and Consentius which makes specific reference to the *Epistula*. Bradbury references this and other recent evidence in his seminal study and translation which seem to have the last word on that issue. He also provides a solid historical overview of the letter, its composition, and manuscript transmission. He states, however,

The *Epistula Severi* is demonstrably an authentic text of the early fifth century and its manuscript tradition is, in fact, quite good. Yet much work remains to be done on the

letter, first, to elucidate its contents, and, second, to set it in the broader context of the social and religious life of the period.⁴⁰

Subsequently there have been a number of studies which seek to do that in various ways.

There has been a lot of discussion about Saint Stephen and his role in the events on Minorca which Severus describes. Bovon⁴¹ has the best overview of the studies about Saint Stephen in his *Dossier on Stephen, the First Martyr*. He includes therein a discussion of the role of St. Stephen in the events in the *Epistula*: “The text is interesting because it is written by the bishop of Minorca and because it shows how the relics, in the middle of the fifth century C.E., were able to convert a whole island, although not without developing strong anti-Jewish feelings in the population.”⁴² Peter Brown⁴³ cites St. Stephen on Minorca as an example in a discussion in which he describes clean versus unclean power in *The Cult of Saints*. Ginsberg, on the other hand, while acknowledging Brown’s position, reminds us of the importance of grounding such a study in historical context and he thus asserts that the letter is part of a larger scheme that shows the Christianizing of previously Jewish venues and locations, with Stephen as an example of a particularly anti-Jewish saint.

But the evidence I have assembled shows, I think, that the extremely ambivalent attitude toward the Jews played a crucial role in the emergence of the cult of the saints. The religious violences which took place in Minorca are just an episode in a much longer story in which St. Stephen, or at least his relics, played an anti-Jewish role.⁴⁴

The importance of St. Stephen’s relics in the letter has been raised often by scholars and it is undoubtedly worth considering. However, rather than examining what the letter tells us about St. Stephen’s cult like Bovon or Ginsburg, I will examine how Severus makes use of the relics as

⁴⁰ Bradbury 1996: 3

⁴¹ Bovon 2003

⁴² Bovon 2003: 304

⁴³ Brown 1981

⁴⁴ Ginzburg 1996: 215

part of his discourse to promote an anti-Jewish sentiment as well as a means to camouflage the violence he employs against the Jews on Minorca.

Many scholars have seen anti-Jewish sentiment as a central element in the letter. Hunt, who describes the *Epsitula* as “a letter composed to glorify the works of God among men,”⁴⁵ sees the letter as ideological in nature and representing a new attitude among Christians which is specifically anti-Jewish.

The saint's intervention, it appears, is no more than the pious embellishment of a narrative which, stripped to its essentials, recounts a highly successful campaign of intimidation and violence by the Christian minority in Mago—aided by their fellow-congregation from Iamo—against the dominant Jewish population of their town.⁴⁶

This conflict is further explored by Sivan who argues that it results in a discourse of Christian imperialism. Sivan shows how the letter legitimizes the Christian dominance on Minorca by the creation of opposed forces which required the forced conversion of the Jews to restore balance and peace. “The discourse of forced conversion privileged the Christians of Minorca as the only true citizens of the island.”⁴⁷ We find similar arguments in the post-colonial study, *Remains of the Jews*, in which Jacobs⁴⁸ describes a shifting ideological landscape in this period where Jewish sites are co-opted as Christian holy places as a means of creating an exclusively non-Jewish Christian history.

Fredericksen explores the development of the *adversus Iudaeos* movement in Christian writing in the fourth and fifth centuries. She includes the *Epistula Severi* in her list of documents that are part of this tradition. In her description of the ambiguities of attitudes of both Christians and Jews as reflected in the laws and literature of the time, she states:

⁴⁵ Hunt 1982: 107

⁴⁶ Hunt 1982: 114

⁴⁷ Sivan 2013: 133

⁴⁸ Jacobs 2003

Bishop Severus's action against Minorca's Jewish community was unquestionably illegal. But Severus took great pains to broadcast his deed as widely as possible. He composed and circulated an encyclical letter about the affair, closing by urging his fellow bishops to "take up Christ's zeal against the Jews . . . for the sake of their eternal salvation." Severus hoped that his initiative would serve as the "spark" by which "the whole earth might be ablaze with the flame of love" to burn down the Jewish "forest of unbelief" (Letter of Severus 30.2, 31.2– 4).⁴⁹

Thus she makes the case for the letter as an example of the anti-Jewish propaganda which accompanied the spreading discourse of the time. Similarly, Dilley compares the *Epistula Severi* to the New Testament Apocrypha in his research. He examines the propagandistic nature of these texts and explains how Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries used these writings to invent new traditions to justify their anti-Jewish activities while attempting to clearly define their own identity as separate and superior. As such, they are important documents in representing the development of anti-Jewish violence during a time period that was still ambivalent in its treatment of Jews. Dilley describes his goal and the *Epistula* thus:

... I show how invented Christian tradition was closely related to other publicly circulated anti-Jewish propaganda, in particular bishop Severus of Minorca's *Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*. This pamphlet is an apology for synagogue attacks and Jewish conversion, heavily based on a rhetoric of the miraculous, and carefully suggesting that the violent actions fell within the legal boundaries of the Christian Roman Empire, which however upheld the necessity of "voluntary" conversion despite increasing restrictions on Jews. Despite their emphasis on the fantastic, these texts presented themselves, and were often accepted, as "official" documents; they are an important yet neglected source for the history of Christianization, both for their relationship to specific events and as evidence for cultural expectations and propaganda, specifically among more radical groups.⁵⁰

Comparing the *Epistula Severi* to other propaganda texts like the *Acts of Pilate* and the *Story of Joseph*, he makes an argument for the importance of these texts "in the formation of collective identity, especially in relation to religious others; and the central goal of invented tradition was the incitement of religious hatred, or zeal, of Christians against Jews, through the use of

⁴⁹ Fredericksen 2013: 257

⁵⁰ Dilley 2010: 589-590

narrative.”⁵¹ I think he is correct in his description of these texts. His essay, however, is brief and, like most of the previously mentioned research, only treats the *Epistula* in passing as one of a collection of narratives. I will add to these studies by analyzing the *Epistula* in a systematic way with a much greater depth of detail. I will show both how the author used rhetoric to promote a subtly violent, anti-Jewish discourse and how he constructs a Christian identity which leaves no room for unconverted Jews to exist.

The above mentioned studies have been of great use in setting the letter into its historical context but, unlike my goal, they do not attempt to delve into the letter itself and look for clues about the author or how he seeks to promote his agenda in his manner of composition. Rather, they take the narrative at face value and try to show how it fits into a larger historical scheme. Ross Kraemer⁵², on the other hand, takes a detailed look at the role of women in the letter and argues that there is a polarizing dynamic of representing the Jews as wrongly gendered in their portrayals in the *Epistula* until they convert. In other words, the Jewish woman do not fill their proper role as subservient wives, as seen by their continued resistance after the men all convert, and the men are shown to be feminized and ineffectual until they become Christian. Thus the *Epistula* serves to show a particular concept for gender roles that are favored by the Christian writer of the text. Kraemer’s feminist approach is a good example of the way in which literary theory can be used to help elucidate meaning from the letter. I will likewise employ literary theory in applying rhetorical narrative criticism to better understand the discourse which underlies the narrative.

Perhaps one of the most significant studies of the letter is by Daniel Boyarin. In his article, “The Christian Invention of Judaism: The Theodosian Empire and the Rabbinic Refusal

⁵¹ Dilley 2010: 604

⁵² Kraemer 2009

of Religion,” he argues that there was no concept of Judaism as a unique religious group among the Jews themselves. Rather, they were an ethnic group with particular cultural practices. As mentioned above, the delineation between Christians and Jews, like that between Christian and pagan, was a Christian concept created to further the notion of Christian identity. Boyarin uses the *Epistula Severi* as one of his examples to show how the process developed.

I wish to suggest a reading in which the *Epistula Severi* is not primarily about an instance of the forced conversion of Jews or in support of forced conversions but an aspect of the invention of “the conversion of the Jew” through which the “Christian only exists,” that is, part of a process of the making of a new status for Judaism, one that takes account of the “remainder,” the necessity that the Jew paradoxically remain in order for the Christian to find both himself and an Other.⁵³

I agree with this interpretation of the letter. I am especially pleased by the way in which Boyarin ignores arguments about the veracity of the letter in representing actual events on the island since that is not relevant to the interpretation of the content of the letter itself. However, Boyarin spends much of the rest of his study of the letter examining the use of the terms *religio* and *superstitio* to show how the letter might represent a shift in the Christian concept of Judaism as a separate religion rather than a heresy as it had previously been viewed. His focus is thus rather narrow and aims at the larger purpose of his essay without delving deeply into the letter itself.

Like Boyarin, I will not concern myself with the truthfulness of the letter in representing actual events but instead focus on examining the narrative as it is presented by the author. However, unlike Boyarin, I will not suppose the letter is able to say anything about Judaism as it actually existed in the beginning of the fifth century since there are no Jewish perspectives represented in the letter. Rather, I will explore the identity of the Christians as it is suggested by the author and show how he tries to influence the theoretical audience into accepting his view through the crafting of his narrative.

⁵³ Boyarin 2004: 37

Rhetorical Narrative Criticism and the *Epistula Severi*

From its origins in Russian formalism and structuralism, narrative criticism has undergone many developments, especially in the past two decades. The foundations laid by Propp, Todorov, Barthes, Genette, and others have been built upon in an increasingly diverse manner. Post-structuralism, culture theory, feminist theory, deconstruction, post-colonialism, and many others have made great strides toward understanding narratives in new ways. Even the definition of narrative has expanded so that it no longer is limited to specific literary genres. This has resulted in the utilization of narrative theories for the study of writing that has never been examined through such lenses. For instance, the Gospels and other Biblical texts have been increasingly explored using literary criticism although such studies had not been considered prior to the 1970's.⁵⁴

The *Epistula Severi*, while written as a factual account of real events, is a narrative; that is, a communication in which someone tells someone about something that happened.⁵⁵ “The representation of reality in narrative form, Auerbach proposed, is a basic element of literature that transcends traditional distinctions between aesthetic and historical purposes.”⁵⁶ Calling it a narrative does not deny its truthfulness. Rather, it recognizes that there is a deeper level of meaning than the surface layer.

In reality, nothing in the assumptions or presuppositions of narrative criticism calls into question the legitimacy of historical investigation. There is no reason why a text that is examined with regard to its poetic function cannot also be examined by a different method that is interested in its referential function.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Powell 1991: 2

⁵⁵ Based on Phelan's definition of narrative, “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose that something happened.” Phelan 2007: 7

⁵⁶ Powell 1991: 4

⁵⁷ Powell 1991: 96

The *Epistula Severi* has not been analyzed for its narrative content. The details which the author reveals have been taken at face value even when they involve unrealistic events like dreams and miracles, not to mention the conversion of the Jews themselves. Likewise, it has been assumed that the author of the letter and the figure named Severus in the letter are the same person with the same intentions. In some instances, these clearly fictional elements of the letter have been explained as attempts by the author to magnify the glory of God and not meant to be taken seriously.⁵⁸ However, they are a major part of the narrative and dismissing them so lightly seems to me to be completely unacceptable. Rather, it is essential to consider them as intentionally included in the letter and give them equal weight to other elements. Clearly the author included them for a reason. We should seek to discover that reason by viewing all the details that are included and, for that matter, excluded.

Rhetorical narrative criticism views narrative as, "a multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience."⁵⁹ The method studies the elements of a narrative to explore the ways in which the author shapes the telling for an intended purpose. The basic premise is that any narrative can be told in multiple ways. The way in which the storyteller chooses to tell the story (i.e. the discourse s/he uses) affects the understanding of the story by the audience.

Story is the *what* of a narrative; discourse is the *how*. Story indicates the content of the narrative, including events, characters, and settings, and their interaction as the plot. Discourse indicates the rhetoric of the narrative, how the story is told. The four canonical Gospels, for example, share a similar (although not identical) story of Jesus, but the discourse of each Gospel is distinctive. The story is where the characters interact; the discourse is where the implied author and implied reader interact. Story and discourse are not really separable. What we have, in Chatman's words, is the story-as-discoursed. It is this about which narrative critics ask, How does the text mean?⁶⁰

⁵⁸ e.g. This is Hunt's view.

⁵⁹ Herman et al. 2012: 3

⁶⁰ Malbon in Anderson 2008: 32

As Malbon mentions, rhetorical narrative criticism relies on the notion of an implied author and implied audience which are distinct from the flesh-and-blood author and audience. Phelan describes the implied author as, “The streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's traits and abilities. The implied author is responsible for the choices that create the narrative text as ‘these words in this order’ and that imbue the text with his or her values.”⁶¹ For the *Epistula Severi*, the flesh-and-blood author is the man Severus who was a bishop. He may or may not have been assisted in writing the letter by Consentius.⁶² In rhetorical criticism, it is not important whether he wrote alone or in collaboration. The focus on the text frees us from that concern because we know that the text had an author who was effectively created by the real life author(s). This implied author had a particular goal in writing the narrative and that, in turn, affected the way he wrote it. Thus we have a letter relating a story-as-discourse about the events that occurred on Minorca. Understanding the discourse is the key to understanding what the author hoped to achieve in the way he wrote his narrative. “Generally speaking, any discourse aims at transforming readers’ old knowledge about something (deficient knowledge) into new knowledge, which is nothing else than the author’s point of view.”⁶³

In addition, there is one other figure who is involved in the narration of the narrative: the narrator. The narrator is a fictional being created within the confines of the narrative (and therefore part of the narrative) who tells the events to a narratee. Likewise, the narratee is a fictional creation within the text. In the case of the *Epistula Severi*, the narrator is a character named Severus (clearly modeled after the real person who is (one of) the flesh-and-blood author(s) of the letter) and the narratee is those addressed in the letter.

⁶¹ Phelan 2004: 216

⁶² Bradbury (1996: 57-59) gives a detailed account of the reasons for believing this to be the case and he provides an impressive collection of comparisons between Consentius’ writing elsewhere and the letter.

⁶³ Patte 1990: 20

The actual/authorial/narrative distinction helps us deal with numerous literary issues: it helps us to explain the relationship between truth and fiction, to reconceptualize the notion of authorial intention (with particular attention to the relationship between internal mental events and external conventions), to analyze the underpinnings of particular interpretive disputes...Our overarching interest, we hasten to add, remains the ways in which (implied) authors communicate with actual audiences.⁶⁴

We must be careful to distinguish that Severus the narrator is not the same as the flesh-and-blood author because we have no way to confirm that the real Severus actually thought or would have said the things the character says. That will become clearer upon close inspection of the characters in the narrative.

Analyzing authorial intention requires examining the narrative components. Beyond the implied author and audience, characters, setting, and plot must be studied. Each of these can be viewed for their mimetic, thematic, and synthetic components.

...audiences will develop interests and responses of three kinds, each related to a particular component of the narrative: mimetic, thematic, and synthetic. Responses to the mimetic component involve an audience's interest in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as like their own, that is, hypothetically or conceptually possible; responses to the mimetic component include our evolving judgments and emotions, our desires, hopes, expectations, satisfactions, and disappointments. Responses to the thematic component involve an interest in the ideational function of the characters and in the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues being addressed by the narrative. Responses to the synthetic component involve an audience's interest in and attention to the characters and to the larger narrative as artificial constructs.⁶⁵

As we shall see, in the *Epistula Severi* the most important component is thematic. The author has less interest in the mimetic or synthetic components of his narrative than in promoting his ideological agenda. His explicit emphasis on the thematic elements comes at the expense of the mimetic and eventually the synthetic elements which creates a less persuasive presentation in the long run (for the modern audience, at least). However, we must be cautious in our judgements here because of the nature of our relationship as modern flesh-and-blood readers to the text. "The

⁶⁴ Herman et al. 2012: 140-141

⁶⁵ Phelan 2007: 5-6

goal of narrative criticism is to read the text as the implied reader...To read in this way, it is necessary to know everything that the text assumes the reader knows and to 'forget' everything that the text does not assume the reader knows."⁶⁶ For example, we are tempted to dismiss the dreams and miracles that Severus the narrator relates to the audience as fanciful, untrue, or at any rate, unbelievable (in other words, as mimetically weak). His ideal audience would not have had a similar notion about them at all. Rather, they would have expected to hear them and would be willing to accept his interpretations as correct when he provides them.

As is now apparent, just like there is an implied author, there is also an implied or authorial audience which is distinct from both the narratee and the flesh-and-blood audience.

Narrative critics generally speak of an implied reader who is presupposed by the narrative itself. This implied reader is distinct from any real, historical reader in the same way that the implied author is distinct from the real, historical author. The actual responses of real readers are unpredictable, but there may be clues within the narrative that indicate an anticipated response from the implied reader.⁶⁷

It is obvious that we, reading the letter today, were not the ideal audience that the author envisioned. He would not have been planning to influence us with his words and could not possibly predict what we would know or believe from his narrative. Rather, he, like any author, had to assume an audience which would read his text. That audience may have been the one to whom the letter is addressed. Yet it is also possible and highly probable, that he had a different audience in mind and that the audience named in the narrative is as fictional as the narrator himself. As the narrator is a character in the narrative based on the implied author, the named audience (i.e. the narratee) is based on the ideal (implied) audience he wishes to influence with his words. The task of the rhetorical narrative critic is to examine the way in which the author crafts his narrative (i.e. his story and discourse) to achieve that end. In doing so, it is possible to

⁶⁶ Powell 1991: 20

⁶⁷ Powell 1991: 19

recognize the point of view of the implied author and his assumptions about his ideal audience. This will provide insight into his concept of Christian identity in the early fifth century which is critical to our understanding of the development of the cultural discourse of the time.

In short, narrative criticism is certainly not an antihistorical discipline. In fact, a symbiotic relationship exists between narrative and historical approaches to texts. Although the two methods cannot be used simultaneously, they can be used side by side in a supplementary fashion. They might even be viewed as necessary complements, each providing information that is beneficial to the exercise of the other.⁶⁸

In this way, and as I intend to employ it, rhetorical narrative criticism is a tool to supplement the work that has been done by other methods like those employed by Bradbury to understand the historical situation of the letter.

Chapter Overview

Arguably the most significant part of the narrative is the plot itself and so I will begin by examining it in detail. Rather than a straight forward recounting of the significant events, it is a careful construction of occurrences both realistic and fantastic. The author attempts to make them seem feasible by the construction of the Severus character, using him as the implied narrator. However this is an artifice. Instead, I will examine what the implied narrator tells us, what he does not, and the manner in which he brings together events to manipulate the implied audience to accept his story and thus his discourse. As Herman says, "Here is another important point about narrative. It at one and the same time fills and creates gaps. This is an insight that first received extended development by Wolfgang Iser and Meir Sternberg in the 1970s. As Iser wrote, 'it is only through the inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism.'"⁶⁹ Severus creates a number of dramatic gaps where he leaves out major events (like the burning of the

⁶⁸ Powell 1991: 98

⁶⁹ Abbott 2007: 44

synagogue). He also includes information that has only come to him through external sources and not in the chronological order in which the story is told. Thus his narrative plot (*i.e.* story as discourse) is intentionally arranged to influence the reader to believe him and accept his point of view.

In the second chapter, I will scrutinize the characters that appear in the *Epistula Severi*. Chief among the characters are Severus himself and Theodorus, the leader of the Jews. These represent the historical figures that existed but the implied author creates a fictionalized version of them. Severus is portrayed as a humble servant of the Church whose only concern is the protection of his people and the salvation of the Jews. In fact, this same image is used to promote religiously motivated violence against them.

*Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter
admittitis, zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem
perpetua salute suscipite.*

Wherefore, if you accept respectfully the word of an unworthy sinner, take up Christ's zeal against the Jews, but do so for the sake of their eternal salvation.⁷⁰

The use of language and description throughout guides the implied audience to create an image that is clearly programmatic for the discourse. The repetition of Severus' unworthiness and lowness of his station contrasts sharply with the worldly Theodorus who is the center of civic activity in the capital of the island. This dichotomy represents the polarization of the two groups who are otherwise shown to be living in harmony prior to the arrival of Severus and St. Stephen's relics. Rather than real people, the characters which appear in the letter are literary constructs (which may or may not resemble people who really existed) that can be examined as part of the author's art. "Since characters are shaped by their authors to attain certain ends and effects, it makes perfect sense to inquire why and to what end they endowed their characters with

⁷⁰ Bradbury 1996: 80-81

this particular selection of features."⁷¹ Likewise, several other characters including Reuben, Meletius, and Innocentius must also be examined to show how the author directs the narrative through the use of character.

Similar to the presentation of characters, the setting of the narrative, which is the focus of chapter three, is a crucial element to understanding the discourse of this letter. Severus describes Minorca as a Roman outpost, far from society and isolated in its existence. His otherworldly description makes possible a society in which Christians and Jews live in constant opposition to one another and only feign to be civil. Even the plants and animals seem to take sides symbolically in the contrast between the opposing forces. The author also manipulates the representation of passing time to direct the audience to pay attention to the details he wants revealed and to be unaware of what happened behind the scene of his story. Close reading of the text allows us to see how the implied author crafts the setting of the narrative to steadily guide his audience to adopt his chosen world view.

The fourth chapter considers the author's use of dreams and miracles. It is easy for a modern reader to discount these elements of the letter as pure fiction or common tropes of the time. A more nuanced reading requires that we dispel any modern prejudice about the inclusion of dreams and miracles in a supposedly historical work of ancient literature and instead concentrate on the meaning behind them. Considered in the same way we do in reading other ancient narratives, whether novels or histories, they become important ecphrases that are used by the author as a meditation on the discourse. Their inclusion, which interrupts the forward flow of the narrative, signals the reader that something grander is being contemplated and should be examined. The fact that the narrator comments on them heightens the effect.

⁷¹ Margolin in Herman 2007: 68

The tendency to draw conclusions based on the course of the story will be even stronger when the textual viewers do voice interpretations. These viewers usually see artworks and dreams as containing deeper meaning that has a bearing upon their own life, or rather upon its future course – what for us constitutes the forthcoming narrative. As such, the understanding attributed to them will work to affect the readers' understanding of the passage and of its function in the narrative.⁷²

Severus the narrator, as in all aspects of the letter, is the focalizing agent through which the dreams and miracles are filtered. This provides the implied author with a ready voice for commenting on his discourse in a more direct manner while also removing that discussion from the explicit events of the story. In this way, he can provide specific examples of how to interpret his letter, how the use of violence against the Jews can be justified, and why their conversion should be seen as a natural progression in the development of Christianity as the imperial, divinely sanctioned religion.

Finally, in the last chapter, I will bring these elements together to show how the *Epistula Severi* as a whole provides a fictional narrative. While it is undoubtedly true that the letter is an important historical document, it should be kept in mind that it is a single artefact.

Yet behind the awkward issue of authenticity lies a central feature of letter-writing: epistolary technique always problematizes the boundary between reality and fiction. Epistolary discourse entails the construction of a self based on an assumption of what might interest the intended addressee. Thus the slippery question of sincerity may be bypassed for a closer look at the rhetoric of epistolary self-representation. Every letter is an artefact purporting to be historically authentic. But better to ask not whether Ovid's Sappho writing to Phaon represents the 'real' poet of Lesbos, but rather what rhetorical effect Ovid achieves by representing her voice through the medium of a letter.⁷³

Likewise it should be with the character of Severus, the bishop of Minorca. Rather than focus on whether or not all of the Jews converted to Christianity or what that might have meant to them, we should think about the rhetoric of the implied author in creating the discourse behind this story told as a letter. Then we can see how it provides and reinforces an image of Christian

⁷² Bartsch 1989: 38-39

⁷³ Rosenmeyer in Morgan 1994:147

identity. This construct is created through the “othering” of the Jews on Minorca and is consistent with the spreading ideology of the period. As an early example of the more militaristic and violent movement against Jews which would become commonplace in subsequent centuries, the rhetoric of the letter suggests the establishment of an identity which includes the development and promotion of the imperialistic ideology of the Church.

Chapter 1: Plot

The *Epistula Severi* is a narrative account of events that purportedly occurred on the island of Minorca in the early fifth century. For the majority of readers the most important part of a story is its plot. "Plot...is the organizing line and intention of narrative, thus perhaps best conceived as an activity, a structuring operation elicited in the reader trying to make sense of those meanings that develop only through textual and temporal succession."¹ The author's choice of what he relates, what he leaves out, and how he presents the details all affect the reader in certain ways. The reader, in turn, can examine those same details to gain an understanding both of the story the author tells and of the author's goal in telling it.

Severus' narrative is told in the form of a letter. The epistolary form becomes a frame to contain the narrative. This means that the audience reading the narrative has basic expectations of form from the beginning. For instance, one expects a salutation, introduction, exposition, closure, and valediction. Indeed, all of these things are found in the letter. The choice of epistolary form sends a message to the reader about what to expect but does not dictate the contents of the narrative. At the same time, it does not reflect the veracity of the material contained within the letter. If this letter had been from the perspective of Theodorus, for example, the description of events and the way in which they were reported most likely would have been quite different. Likewise, had it been written to a Jewish audience, it would have had a different purpose and thus not related the events in the same way.

The focus on purpose is an important part of understanding the plot of the narrative. The events are not a collected list of random occurrences. Rather, the author has carefully arranged them in a progression from beginning to end to achieve his desired goal. "The rhetorical

¹ Brooks in Richardson 2002: 131

approach conceives of narrative as a purposive communicative act. In this view, narrative is not just a representation of events but is also itself an event – one in which someone is doing something with a representation of events.”² The implied author makes use of form, content, and order in telling his narrative. (In subsequent chapters, we shall see the way that characters and settings have been intentionally crafted to produce certain reactions in readers.) “Texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways; those designs are conveyed through the words, techniques, structures, forms, and intertextual relations of texts.”³ Examining the way the plot is constructed, then, can reveal the discourse of the narration.

Severus, the implied author, had a message to deliver. He chose to deliver the message in the form of a letter which contains a story. However this is an artifice. The author attempts to make his story feasible by the construction of the Severus character, using him as the narrator. The narrator, Severus, relates a personal account of events to an imaginary narratee, the recipients of the letter. This is the story aspect of the narration. Through this artifice, the implied author speaks indirectly to an implied audience. This is the discourse aspect of the narration. I will examine what the implied narrator tells us, what he does not, and the manner in which he brings together events to compel the implied audience to accept his story and thus his discourse. As Herman says, "Here is another important point about narrative. It at one and the same time fills and creates gaps. This is an insight that first received extended development by Wolfgang Iser and Meir Sternberg in the 1970s. As Iser wrote, ‘it is only through the inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism.’ ”⁴ Severus creates a number of dramatic gaps where he leaves out major events (like the burning of the synagogue). He also includes dreams, miracles, and information that have come only to him through external sources, and he recounts them not

² Phelan in Herman 2007: 203

³ Phelan in Herman 2007: 209

⁴ Abbott in Herman 2007: 44

necessarily in the chronological order in which they occurred. Thus his narrative plot (i.e. story as discoursed⁵) is intentionally arranged to influence the reader to believe him and accept his point of view.

The salutation at the start of the letter opens the narrative frame for the rest of the text. From the beginning, it delivers a message through its form and choice of words. It marks the creation of the implied author as a distinct character and imbues him with certain characteristics.

The beginning of a text is governed by the modelling of causality, whereas the end stresses goals,⁶ and this would seem to be a valuable way of linking plot structure to the “edge” of the text, the point at which the text passes into, and is closed off from, nonaesthetic space. The beginning of a text, finally, is the point at which the distancing between author and narrator usually occurs...⁷

As a frame, it creates a literary picture of both an artificial narrator, Severus, and an artificial narratee, the recipients of the letter, which, in turn, is meant to convey information from Severus to an audience. It also creates the expectation of an ending that will explain the contents of the letter in some way and, possibly, ask for something in return. That expectation is fulfilled by the end. In this sense, the beginning and the end of the letter are the most important parts. As the framing structure, they are the parts most likely to be remembered by the reader. The beginning must be dynamic and interesting enough to capture the attention of the audience and indicate what the implied author wants the audience to think. The ending must be satisfying and compelling enough to convince the audience to accept the author’s point of view. Everything in between is the author’s opportunity to influence the audience to arrive at the point of view he desires them to have. There is a natural flow between the textual elements of the story and the readerly dynamics in reaction to them. “A narrative’s movement from its beginning to its end is governed by both a textual and a readerly dynamics, and understanding their interaction provides

⁵ Chatman as quoted in Powell 1990: 23

⁶ Lotman as referenced in a footnote in Frow in Richardson 2002: 334

⁷ Frow in Richardson 2002: 334

a good means for recognizing a narrative's purposes."⁸ Thus the narrative progression from beginning to middle to end is a crucial element in understanding the discourse of the letter.

In studying the character of Severus, the narrator, we see the way the implied author established at the start a mindset of binary opposition between Christians and Jews. This was the point in the narration which showed separation between the flesh-and-blood author, the implied author, and the character narrator. The salutation and the introduction of the Severus character form the exposition at the opening of the narrative.

Elements of exposition matter because they influence our understanding of the narrative world, which in turn influences our understanding of the meaning and consequences of the action, including our initial generic identifications of the narrative and the expectations that follow from that identification.⁹

The implied author creates a world that is specific to his discourse. The authorial audience is invited to become part of that world as a means of accepting the discourse. If the audience rejects the world that is established by the implied author, there can be no forward movement in the narrative. The reader will stop reading or consciously choose to reject the discourse. Severus makes direct appeals to his audience to accept the world he creates by referencing, for example, the selection from Tobit and claiming that it would be wrong to conceal the miracles of God (1.1-2). This creates a suspenseful intrigue that heightens the curiosity of the reader to find out what he means. At the same time, it tells us something about the ideal, narrative audience for whom Severus was writing. For one, he fully expects his audience to have familiarity with Tobit and other biblical references. He also assumes that his audience will be Christian and sympathetic to his story. His discourse, then, will involve the way he convinces his audience of something more than just being sympathetic. It is necessary to study the entire plot or narrative progression in order to see what that is and how he does it.

⁸ Phelan 2014: 210

⁹ Phelan 2007: 16

The story begins with the description of the island. It is a logical beginning for anyone who is not familiar with Minorca. It also serves the dual purpose of providing a geographical setting for the story and a philosophical one for the discourse. The establishment of the binary opposition at the beginning of the letter is essential for everything that follows. The storyline is dependent on the oppositional nature of the relationship between the Jews and Christians, and the discourse which continues to unfold is based on the concept of the two groups being at odds. The geography of the island actually is not described in much detail. The landscape of conflict is more important than the real life terrain. The same is true of the social relationships which are detailed in the beginning exposition. The narration creates a picture of conflict brewing just below the surface in any engagement of Christians and Jews. But there are gaps in the descriptions that leave room for wondering about the reality of the situation. For example, are there only Christians and Jews on the island? Where are the pagans? How did Jews get to be in such prominent political and social positions in the government in Magona if there is such dislike for them among the Christians? Severus gives no explanation for these gaps in the story. Rather, he quickly slides beyond them and moves toward the conflict which arises after the arrival of the saint's relics. It is an effective technique as the reader gets caught up in the more pressing issue of the building trouble and the issues of realism (mimetic plausibility) are forgotten. This is a general pattern that marks the progression of the textual elements in the narrative.

On the textual side narratives proceed by the introduction, complication, and resolution (in whole or in part) of two kinds of unstable situations. The first kind exists on the level of story, that is, the events and existents, including character and setting, of narrative, and I call them simply *instabilities*: they involve relations within, between, or among characters and their situations. ... The second kind exists at the level of discourse, that is, the narration and its techniques, and I call them *tensions*: they involve relations among authors, narrators, and audiences, and they include gaps between tellers and audiences of knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and values.¹⁰

¹⁰ Phelan 2014: 212

The instability presented at the beginning is the relationship between the Christians and the Jews. This is supported by the setting which creates binary opposition. In turn, this creates a tension between reality and the world of the *Epistula Severi*. However, the tension is lessened if the audience is willing to accept the reality which Severus creates. The letter progresses through movements of instabilities among the characters and the tensions as the reader is drawn into the authorial audience.

The initial depiction of life on the island is one of disquiet. This does not mean that life was actually like that in the real world. Certain contradictions in the text lead the reader to believe that there was less ill will between Christians and Jews than Severus says (e.g. the reference to social interactions like greetings and even the mention of affection among the two peoples in section 5).¹¹ But Severus describes a society in which the status quo is less peaceful or stable and resentment lurks below the surface. The first disrupting instability to come to the island then is the arrival of St. Stephen's relics...or, rather, the appointment of Severus as bishop¹². Severus introduces the arrival of the relics with the seemingly offhand comment that they came, "nearly on the same day on which I, although unworthy, acquired the title of such priesthood".¹³ This is the first actual event in the story and the narrator signals right away that he will be substituting one thing for another in his recounting. Although he makes the case that St. Stephen was the inspiration for the events that unfolded, he has also makes it clear indirectly that

¹¹ Some modern scholars (e.g Bradbury) have argued that these are clear indications of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Jews.

¹² Most scholars accept Severus' claim that the relics are the cause of the conflict against the Jews because they inspired such a strong reaction in the Christians. I am not saying they did not. Rather, rhetorically in the *Letter*, Severus uses them as an excuse to stir up violence against the Jews. The mention of these two events as connected shows that he wants them connected in the reader's mind.

¹³ *diebus paene isdem, quibus ego tanti sacerdotii nomen, licet indignus, adeptus sum* 4.1

everything started with his own arrival. As if to remove any doubt about the swiftness of his actions, he repeatedly employs fire imagery¹⁴ to describe the reaction among the Christians.

Quo facto, protinus ille, quem Dominus 'venit mittere in terram' et quem valde ardere¹⁵ cupit, caritatis eius ignis accensus est. Statim siquidem tepor noster incaluit et factum est cor nostrum, sicut scriptum est, 'ardens in via'. Nunc enim iam illud fidei amburebat zelus, nunc spes salvandae multitudinis erigebat. (4.3)

When this was done, immediately that fire of his love ignited, which the Lord ‘came to scatter onto the earth’ and which he wants to burn brightly. Indeed at once our warmth grew hot and our hearts became, as it is written, ‘burning on the path.’ For now that zeal of our faith was burning, now the hope of saving the crowd was exciting us. (4.3-4)

This fiery beginning to the story is meant to catch the attention of the audience. It also sets the tone for the rest of the conflict between the two parties as it shows the Christians to be inspired by holy passion to serve the church and bring salvation to the disbelieving Jews. Their motivation is thus pure and even supported by scripture as shown by the two allusions to Luke.¹⁶

Yet, as soon as he introduces the conflict, he interrupts it, building suspense. Theodorus is presented as the typical villain of the story, powerful and corrupt. He is a noble, influential man on whom the Jews and even some Christians depended. Tapping into the binary opposition of Christians and Jews presented earlier in the introduction, Theodorus becomes the symbolic opposite of Severus. His power, and that of the Jews, is earthly.¹⁷ The Christians, on the other hand, are shown to be physically weaker but humble in their hearts and stronger in truth.¹⁸

Therefore the Jews put their trust in Theodorus but the Christians put theirs in the saint. This, of

¹⁴ Gaddis (2005: 185-186) discusses the common use of fire imagery in religious zeal, especially as it relates to violence. “Fire imagery was often used to describe the Holy Spirit, Mary’s conception, and the presence of Christ within the Eucharist. Great zeal for the faith was commonly represented as ‘fire’ within the heart. It is in this context that we must understand the many stories of fire miracles by which holy men, Syrian as well as others, demonstrated their power or legitimated acts of righteous violence.” In this case, the fire of zeal foreshadows the fire which will destroy the synagogue later in the text.

¹⁵ It is significant that although he claims the Christians acted through peace and desire to help the Jews, the imagery he uses is often destructive. Here he talks about fire and burning which foreshadows the ultimate destruction of the synagogue later in the *Letter*.

¹⁶ Bradbury (1996: 83) cites the two quotations as coming from Luke 12:49 and 24:32 respectively.

¹⁷ *et censu et honore saeculi praecipuus erat* 6.1

¹⁸ *corde ita etiam et viribus humiles sed veritatis robore superiores* 6.4

course, is another ruse on Severus' part. The Jews look to their patron, Theodorus, for protection and he provides it by calming the disputes between the two groups. But the flame of faith¹⁹ reignites. It does not happen in Magona, however, where the relics are kept but rather in Jamona where Severus resides. This is the most obvious example of the author concealing the events behind the symbolism of religion. Of course, the narrator may well believe that St. Stephen was responsible for what happened. Certainly he wants his narratees to believe that it is true. But the underlying discourse reveals to us that in fact the bishop was the catalyst for the renewed zeal to move against the Jews.

The story continues with a description of the preparations for the confrontation. The Christians put their faith in Christ. While Severus makes use of suspense in other situations, he does not when referring to the eventual outcome of the conflict. He explicitly indicates that the Christians win despite the minimal odds. What is remarkable is that they do so with little effort because of the support of Christ.²⁰ The author does not want the reader to wonder about the outcome and so he reveals it from the start. This frees the reader to focus instead on how the outcome was achieved which is really the discourse he promotes.

Meanwhile, the Jews look not to their future but to their past as they prepare. They remind themselves of the Maccabees and tell one another they prefer death to losing their heritage.²¹ Therefore they stockpile all manner of weapons to defend themselves. Severus never mentions any weapons in regard to the Christians. Instead, he merely says that they had the protection of the Holy Spirit.²² Severus makes it difficult to cast blame on them since they are weaponless. It is almost as if the Christians win this war despite their own inaction. We know

¹⁹ *fidei flamma* 7.2

²⁰ *absque ullo sudore certaminis exercitui suo hanc quam nemo aut optare audebat aut sperare poterat victoriam concessisse* 8.3

²¹ *Iudaei igitur exemplis se Machabaei temporis cohortantes, mortem quoque pro defendendis legitimis suis desiderabant.* 8.4

²² *virtute Sancti Spiritus praemunitam* 8.5

from the minimal details about the resulting destruction that this is not true but Severus makes a concerted effort to portray the Christians as innocent of any aggression in the unfolding events.

The forward movement of the story is again interrupted at this point while Severus relates the dreams of Theodora and Theodorus. In some ways, the dreams act as a break in the action to allow for reflection on what has happened while the author more actively promotes the discourse. In this instance, we are reintroduced to Theodorus who has not taken a leading role in the story so far. His only contribution has been the brief respite in the conflict which he provided to the inhabitants of Magona by his return from Majorca. The dream sequence serves to both round out his character and to foreshadow what will happen to him later in the story. The Theodorus in the dream is not as self-confident and authoritative as he appeared in his first description. He is moved by fear of the Lion and flees in panic. This, as well as his encounter with Reuben and the solace he seeks from the female relative, are suggestions of where the story will go. Importantly, though, it also develops the discourse by adding a new element to it. In the dreams, Theodorus and the Jews (in the guise of a widow) offer themselves to the Christians. This is significant because it shows willingness rather than coercion. While we can, and should, read between the lines that coercion was in fact the method to get the Jews to convert, Severus shows the reader how to promote a different portrayal of events. The goal is not only to convert the Jews but to make it look like it was their idea.

It is unclear how long the preparations for the “future war”²³ were being made but it was long enough for both groups, significantly described by Severus as “armies”²⁴ to be forewarned by countless dreams, of which the above mentioned were the only two reported. The recounting

²³ *futurum instruitur bellum* 9.1

²⁴ *utrique exercitus* 9.1 Again the word choice is important here. The notion of war and armies stands out in this supposedly peaceful plan especially since Severus claims that the Jews were stockpiling weapons but the Christians had none.

of the dreams appears to fill in the gap that is created because Severus does not relate what actually went on in the Christian city. When he resumes the story, the Christians are prepared and set out eagerly to confront the Jews in Magona. The crossing of the island is condensed into one sentence reflecting the eagerness of the Christians to enjoin their opponents. And then the conflicts begin.

From his arrival in the Magona, Severus is hostile to the Jews. He demands that they meet with him and dismisses their refusals with more demands. He insists that his intention is to carry out peaceful discussion with them²⁵ but his tone is condescending and he insults the Jews by insinuating that they might be using an excuse when they were really planning some kind of trick.²⁶ The verbal sparring between the two parties ends when the Jews are forced to physically meet with Severus. Curiously, Theodorus is absent from all of these activities. In fact, it is unclear who the Jews are with whom Severus was corresponding or who was forced to show up at his house. The narrator simply does not provide any details of that sort. The Lion of God is named as the agent in compelling the Jews to come. This is a convenient symbol to cover any indication of wrong doing or possible violent action. Severus tells us the Jews were terrified by the lion²⁷ but does not tell us how the terror actually was inspired. The reader is left with a gap in the story that he can fill or not, and individual readers may insert different images as they imagine them. The not-telling creates a more powerful story because of the potential variation in how readers react. The discourse is also supported because the likely violence that was employed is never mentioned which is what the implied author desires. It becomes clear that Severus wants an excuse to lead his band to the synagogue and he refuses to accept any argument from the Jews until they allow him to do so.

²⁵ *futurum autem esse modestissimum de lege conflictum, nec excitandas lites sed fabulas esse miscendas* 12.6

²⁶ *si non astute certamen fugerent sed simplicem afferent excusationem* 12.6

²⁷ *illius leonis terrore compulsi* 12.7

As they made their way to the synagogue, they began singing songs to Christ²⁸ because they were so happy. The Jews were likewise moved to sing and joined the Christians in singing the same song.²⁹ Bradbury³⁰ suggests that this is evidence of close ties between the Christians and the Jews, contrary to Severus' earlier claim that the appearance of friendship between the two peoples was out of obligation only. Whether that is true or not, Severus included that detail for a reason. He even includes the words of the song they were singing: *Periit memoria eorum cum strepitu et Dominus in aeternum permanet*.³¹ These lines are pertinent for other reasons. First, they foreshadow what will happen to the Jews by the end of the letter: they will cease to be Jews and instead continue with the Christians. Second, they indicate again that the Jews willingly participate in this destruction of their past identity because they chose to join in the singing with the Christians. And third, it hints at the broader discourse of Christian reclamation of Jewish identity which was unfolding in this time and which Severus reasserts more forcefully later in the letter. It is their memory (i.e. their past) which perishes when they become Christians.

The journey to the synagogue is interrupted by the Jewish women who throw the rocks from the rooftops and high windows. This incites the miraculous riot in which no one is hurt. By this point in the letter it has become clear that every incident which Severus reports serves a purpose of discourse rather than reflecting any realistic picture of events. More time is spent describing the motives of the mob and God's intentions than what must have actually transpired. The destruction of the synagogue is mentioned almost as an afterthought. The focus instead is on the actions brought about by divine will (e.g. it was God's plan that the women throw the rocks, the Lion incited the Christians to attack, etc.). Recognition of divine accomplishments and praise

²⁸ *hymnum Christo per plateam ex multitudine laetitiae canebamus* 13.1

²⁹ *mira iucunditate etiam Iudaeorum populus decantabat* 13.2

³⁰ Bradbury 1996: 128, note 14.

³¹ "Their memory dies with an uproar and the Lord continues forever." 13.2

of God are typical elements in Christian literature. Severus demonstrates how this practice can be used to support his other purpose, the appearance of Christian innocence in situations of anti-Jewish violence. He does not claim that the synagogue was not destroyed. He also does not fail to mention that it happened. It is important both to acknowledge the fact that violence happened and to dissimulate effectively the agency of the Christians in any wrongdoing. Divine support and pureness of intention are appropriate filters for such a discourse. With the synagogue destroyed, the Christians left the scene singing again and turned their attention to the next phase of their campaign.

The story continues after a break of three days. There is a short interlude inserted just before that, however, in which the conversion of Reuben is described. His is the first conversion to occur on the island. It is both sudden and dramatic. “For delighting the hearts of everyone with a very holy cry, he begged to be released from the chains of Jewish superstition.”³² This partially clarifies Theodorus’ unexplained dream that was happened earlier. More significantly, it shows the first convert, seemingly of his own accord, asking to be made a Christian. There is no indication of coercion. The identification of Reuben with the first born son of Jacob lends an authoritative element to the act, however, because it confirms Severus’ earlier statement that God named this man appropriately and intentionally. Therefore, it was God’s will that this should transpire. And, in some sense, it rewrites an element of Jewish history in a new Christian setting that includes Jews becoming Christians rather than Christians distancing themselves from Jews.

Theodorus makes his entrance as an active character in the next segment of the story. This is the epic fight scene: like two warriors surrounded by their supporters, Theodorus and Severus face off against one another. They clash with words, however, and in the battle,

³² *Nam clamore sanctissimo laetificans corda cunctorum, absolvi se a vinculis Iudaicae superstitionis deprecabatur.*
15.2

Theodorus is superior. But the Christians are not vanquished. Severus had predicted this outcome long before when he compared the Jews and the Christians preparing to fight.

Christum vero cuius 'regnum non in sermone sed in virtute est' nobis ne verbum quidem proferentibus, suis omnia viribus consummasse, et absque ullo sudore certaminis exercitui suo hanc quam nemo aut optare audebat aut sperare poterat victoriam concessisse. (8.3)

But Christ, whose 'kingdom is not in word but in virtue' accomplished everything by his own force without us even saying a word, and he granted his army without any sweat of struggle a victory which no one dared to hope for or was able to expect.

In fulfilment of that prophecy, the miracle occurs which leads to Christian victory and Jewish demise. The misunderstanding of the shout for Theodorus to believe leads to a general panic among the Jews and leaves Theodorus alone and vulnerable. Or, at least, that is what Severus wants his audience to believe. As with the other riot, most of the details are missing or symbolically portrayed. "That terrible Lion" appears once again and instills fear in the Jews. Theodorus' dream continues to be realized next when it is revealed that he is standing on the exact spot about which he had dreamed. The singing monks are also depicted again and Reuben shows up. We have no understanding of what else happened during the show-down. We know that many Jews fled in fear for their safety, some even leaving the city for the protection of the wilderness. The cause of their fear, which must have been grand, is not discussed directly. However, it is once again implied and certainly evident from the reaction of the Jews.

His interaction with Reuben provides another opportunity for Severus to shape the discourse by adding something new to it. From the beginning, he has slowly unrolled his agenda. First he created the sense of binary opposition. This was followed by the suggestion that the Jews volunteer to convert rather than be coerced. He then added the notion that this was all part of God's plan. Reuben is responsible for a new element in the formula. He makes an offer of continued prestige and safety for Theodorus if he converts. This is an obvious example of

coercion: the implication is that failure to convert will result in a loss of prestige and possible harm. However it is also a form of negotiation that was not present before. Theodorus obviously perceives it to be such because he accepts but makes a counter offer – give him a little time to make his announcement public so he can gain more prestige by convincing others to convert with him.³³ This is a completely unexpected answer from Theodorus. He is the leader of the Jewish people and responsible for their well-being. His motivation is unclear for making this offer. Is he concerned about his own position and power? Is he willing to sell out his own people for personal gain? Or is he so terrified for his people that he thinks he only can save them by making them convert? Generally speaking, Severus provides the reader with ambiguities when he is trying to communicate something else. When we examine the context of this startling exchange, it starts to make more sense. The previous scene had just shown what happened when the Jews thought their leader had converted. The description of the panic was detailed with women screaming and tearing out their hair and men running for their lives. Theodorus would want that not to happen if he converted. But Severus also would want that not to happen. His discourse is how to convert the Jews without making it seem like a forced or violent affair. Here, he has suggested a new strategy: bribe the leadership and get them to assist. With Theodorus working from the inside, the chance of the Jews offering themselves for conversion is more likely. And indeed, immediately after this, large crowds of Jews assembled at the church and asked to be converted.³⁴

The episode which follows, involving Meletius and Innocentius hiding in the cave, is one of the longest in the letter. There is little forward progression in the narrative (no indication of

³³ *permittite mihi ut prius alloquar plebem meam, ut maiorem conversionis meae etiam ex reliquis possim habere mercedem.* 16.16

³⁴ *Iudaeorum multitudinem convenisse inspeximus, qui omnes unanimiter deprecabantur ut Christi characterem a me, licet indigno pastore, susciperent.* 17.1-2

what was happening in the city while they were gone is provided) in this segment as it almost completely takes place in a cave and it ends up with the two characters returning to the city from which they just had left. It is a curious episode because it shows Innocentius trying to convince Meletius that they should convert. Placed after the short passage in which Theodorus made a strikingly rapid decision to convert and just before the public meeting in which he tries to convince the other Jews to convert with him, this scene takes on a new meaning. It shows the psychological and philosophical argument that Severus wants us to imagine the Jews had in deciding to convert. The notion that the whole population would suddenly convert is unrealistic without at least some internal struggle. This passage provides that. It is unlike any other passage because it represents two sides of the argument for converting. Meletius holds out and tries to resist while Innocentius provides reasons why they should become Christian. However, his arguments sound suspiciously like Severus' discourse. When Meletius complains he cannot drive out the phrase "Christ, in your name"³⁵ from his mind, Innocentius replies:

'Non', inquit, 'frustra hic sermo, quem neque cor tuum, ut apud cunctos probatissimum est, antea cogitavit neque os umquam protulit, hoc praesertim tempore menti tuae, ut asseris, tam violenter insertus est. Ex Deo hoc esse arbitror. 18.7

It is not in vain that this phrase, which neither your heart (which is very well proven among everyone) has ever thought nor your mouth ever produced, has been so violently inserted, as your claim, into your mind especially at this time. I believe it is from God.

The conversion is God's will, according to Innocentius. Those do not seem like the words of a Jew who just fled from the city in fear. However, Innocentius encourages Meletius to struggle harder against the thoughts. When this does not prove to be enough, he tells him that he heard the Christians exclaim that Theodorus had converted and wondered if it were not likely that Meletius too would soon convert like his relative did.³⁶ Based on that supposition he concludes that it is

³⁵ *Christe, in nomine tuo* 18.6

³⁶ *Poteritne fieri ut non etiam tu germani constrictus exemplo religionem Iudaicam deseras?* 18.13

useless for them to remain in the cave and risk the dangers of starvation; they should return to the city. His suggestion that the conversion of Theodorus indicates that it is inevitable that the others will convert is spurious at best and the idea that they should return to Magona for safety is out of place with their flight from there in the first place. His further description of the Christians as “such a merciful people”³⁷, “blameless”³⁸, and “not at all enemies”³⁹ are thoughts that Severus wants his implied audience to have, not what someone who just fled for his life from the city would have said. As unbelievable as these words are to us, they are equally inconceivable to Meletius who rejects them outright and urges voluntary exile before apostasy. And so the two set out to escape again. At this point God intervenes and nature itself rises against them, driving them back toward the city until they eventually, as Innocentius had foreseen, abandon their plan for escape and accept that conversion is their only option. It is worth noting that they did so “against their will and plan”.⁴⁰ When reasoning failed, forced coercion was a valid alternative.

Three days after these events, Theodorus had completed whatever requirements he needed to address his people and brought them together “to call them to faith in Christ”.⁴¹ By the end of this episode many Jews in fact rushed to become Christians.⁴² However it was not because Theodorus convinced them. Instead, before he could address the crowd, two others, a young relative of Theodorus named Galilaeus and another civic leader, Caecilianus, interrupted him. They related powerful anecdotes about how they feared for their lives and could not continue to be Jews for fear of being injured or even murdered.⁴³ This is the most overt reference to violence and forced conversion in the letter. Notably it is expressed by the Jews and not the Christians. If

³⁷ *plebs tam misericors* 18.14

³⁸ *innoxios* 18.14

³⁹ *in nullo sensimus inimicos* 18.14

⁴⁰ *contra voluntatem ac propositum suum* 18.23

⁴¹ *ad fidem Christi provocare* 19.1

⁴² *multosque Iudaeorum eadem die ad fidem Christi...suscepimus.* 19.10

⁴³ *si in Iudaismo perseverare voluero, forsitan perimendus sum.* 19.4

the audience has been won over to Severus' argument by now, they will see that Jewish perception as shown here is not in keeping with the Christian behavior that Severus has been describing all along. Still, it is a strange thing to include as it has the potential to dilute or contradict the message that has been so actively promoted thus far. One possible reason for including it is to draw the attention away from Theodorus. There is a strong possibility that Theodorus could end up looking like the hero in this tale if he were to be the agent responsible for winning over all of the Jews. Such an ending would clearly undermine the whole message of this letter because it would show Theodorus as the charismatic leader who repented from his evil ways and led his people out of darkness into the light. Severus, while not particularly trying to promote himself overtly as the savior here, really aims toward a discourse on how to convert the Jews. To reduce it to one Jewish leader would make it a worthless message in the long run. Instead, by suddenly introducing these two characters who have never shown up before and allowing them to steal the glory from Theodorus, he removes the attention for a single individual. After this episode the audience sees that it takes multiple leaders to convert the whole group. There is also a strong reminder that force or threats of violence have an appropriate and useful role in the process. Theodorus had been frightened into becoming Christian earlier and now Caecilianus, who was also a "father of the Jews"⁴⁴, now expressed his own fear of being harmed as a reason to convert. Theodorus has been rendered irrelevant despite his role in converting the other Jews while Severus has re-emphasized the basic principles of his discourse.

Having accomplished a major goal in the narrative, Severus again interrupts the forward progression with the recounting of prodigies. As usual, he uses the interruption to develop the discourse in a new way. The letter is getting close to its completion and so the discourse needs to be solidified for the audience. The joint miracles, told in reverse order chronologically, provide

⁴⁴ *Caecilianus autem cum esset Iudaeorum pater* 19.2

the final expansion of the discourse along two planes. First, they show that conversion of the Jews is not, in and of itself, the last stage. Rather, Judaism itself must be converted. Severus provides a model for re-claiming Jewish history and therefore Jewish identity as Christian. The Exodus from Egypt does not end with the arrival in the Promised Land. It ends with the arrival via conversion in Christianity. Therefore, Judaism is not itself complete until it makes the rest of the journey as well. The second idea is that it is God's will and it must be diligently pursued throughout the whole world. The remote island of Minorca was chosen as an example for other places to follow. If such miraculous conversions could happen there, then it must be God's design they should be accomplished everywhere. It is both a broad and obvious message he proclaims as his conclusion to the prodigies. But it should not be understated that it shows his letter is not simply an account of what happened on Minorca but rather a call to action for others to go out and employ the same techniques as he did to convert the Jews.

Theodorus finally converted on the next day. He first needed to be reminded by everyone that he had promised.⁴⁵ He was still hesitant to make a formal declaration because he had not spoken with his wife about it since she was still on Majorca. His two concerns were that she would not also convert and that she would choose to leave the marriage (21.2). The Christians were very understanding of his concerns and willing to accommodate them⁴⁶ but the Jews who had already converted became upset and protested his delay. Severus does not explain what ultimately drove him to do it but Theodorus cut short his delay and converted, thus fulfilling the

⁴⁵ *summa omnium expectatio Theodorum ut sponsioni suae satisfaceret admonebat* 21.1

⁴⁶ *Cum haec Theodorus Christianis iam acquiescentibus perorasset, Iudaeis qui conversi fuerant acerrima commotione consistentibus* 21.3

last part of his dream by “hurrying to his female relative’s bosom”.⁴⁷ That is the moment when the floodgates open and the mass conversion occurs.

post quem omnis, tamquam remoto obice, ad ecclesiam synagoga confluit. Mirum dictu, inveterati illi legis doctores sine ulla altercatione verborum, sine ullo scripturarum certamine crediderunt. Tantum percunctati an vellent fidem Christi suscipere, credere se in Christum et Christianos statim fieri cupere profitebantur. (21.4-6)

After him the whole synagogue, just like when an obstacle has been removed, poured toward the church. Wondrous to say, those elderly teachers of the law, without any argument over words, without and fight about scripture, believed. Having doubted so much about whether they were willing to accept Christ’s faith, they professed that they believed in Christ and that they were desiring to become Christians immediately.

In a curious turn of events, it seems like Theodorus has been the obstacle blocking the Jews from converting all along. While that is obviously not the case, the imagery makes it look that way.

Once Theodorus has finally confirmed his promised conversion, everyone else willingly joins, in accordance with Severus’ wishes and the implied author’s discourse.

The letter moves toward a conclusion after the conversion of Theodorus and the majority of the Jews. The next sections all involve final converts. Some are quick and nameless but a few still attempt to resist for a short while before they too convert. In the former category there was an old man who decided to convert before he died (22) and some nameless Jews who, while sailing past the island, were forced ashore by storms and decided to convert while they were there (23). In fact, Severus almost jokingly mentions a brief miracle in which there were repeated rainstorms (25). Every time it rained, another group of Jews converted. In the latter category, those who resisted conversion, included only women. Specifically the women were Artemisia (Meletius’ wife) with her female friends and servants, the unnamed wife of Innocentius, and her sister. Kraemer gives an excellent feminist reading of the role and treatment of these (and other)

⁴⁷ *ad matris propinquae sinum festinus* 21.3

female figures in the text⁴⁸ which I will not try to reproduce. From a rhetorical perspective, these figures also have significance collectively and individually. The fact that only the wives and women resisted was predicted several times in the concerns expressed by Theodorus. One of the reasons he delayed the public announcement of his own conversion was that he was afraid his wife would fail to convert or leave him if he did not discuss it with her first. The actions of Meletius' and Innocentius' wives show that his concern was valid. Also, in terms of closure to the letter, it is appropriate that these women be the last to convert since Meletius and Innocentius were, after Reuben, the first named characters to convert. Their conversion at the end completes the picture symbolically marking the success of Severus' mission.

Each of the (groups of) women also has a rhetorical purpose in the letter reinforcing the discourse one last time before the valediction. When Severus states that there were three who had not yet become Christian, he commented that such was the will of God for the purpose of spreading His glory further.⁴⁹ Their individual purposes are revealed in the recounting of the subsequent passages. The miracle story involving Artemisia shows the re-writing of Jewish history in a Christian context and voluntary conversion. Innocentius' wife reasserts the power of prayer as a means of dissimulating forced conversion. The story about her sister uses biblical support to express the pre-destined outcome that the Jews will convert (i.e. that it is God's will). Since I address the story of Artemisia in the chapter on dreams and miracles, I will focus here on the other two stories instead.

Innocentius' wife resisted conversion for four days. She was unable to be persuaded by her husband through threats or prayers or tears.⁵⁰ And so a whole crowd of Christians laid siege

⁴⁸ Kraemer 2009

⁴⁹ *ad virtutis suae gloriam dilatandam in duritia perfidiae suae Christus permanere aliquantulum passus est* 24.1

⁵⁰ *vel minis vel precibus vel lacrimis moveri posset* 27.2

to her home.⁵¹ It should not go unnoticed that Severus claims they came because Innocentus had asked them to do so. When they arrive, they try to force her to convert with words but she is still not willing.

Cum igitur diu cassa verba surdis auribus ingerentes nihil profecissemus, ad cognitum orationis praesidium convolvimus precesque, quas humana repellebat impietas, ad caelestem misericordiam vertimus. 27.4

Therefore when we had produced nothing forcing pointless words on deaf ears for a long time, we rushed to the known protection of prayer, and we turned prayers which human impiety rejected to heavenly mercy.

It is noteworthy that they “were forcing” (*ingerentes*) the words on her for a long time. The sense of coercion is strong. Her continued resistance and the subsequent assistance sought in prayer is a familiar formula in the letter at this point. The graphic image of the Christian army sweating⁵² in its effort to convert this one woman is almost comical in its hyperbole. The same must be said about the comparison between her and Amalek⁵³. However, for all its absurdity, it again draws an allusion to Exodus⁵⁴ and reiterates the familiar pattern of reclaiming Jewish history in a new Christian context. And, in fact, after a lot of praying and crying, she at last agrees to convert⁵⁵: “And when the people shouted ‘Amen’ at the end of the prayer, she added that she believed and wanted to become a Christian”.⁵⁶ In the end, the decision is hers and she willingly converts. But the emphasis in the passage is on the immense effort the Christians made to convince her. They occupied her house and remained there for hours persuading her. The text explains that they were

⁵¹ *universa Innocentio rogante ad domum in qua habitabat fraternitatis multitudo convenit 27.3*

⁵² *nostri sudavit exercitus 27.5*

⁵³ *Itaque usque in horam ferme tertiam, hymnorum atque orationum proeliis adversus Amalech hostem Iesu ducis nostri sudavit exercitus. (27.5)* “And so up until the third hour our army sweated in battles of hymns and prayers against Amalek, the enemy of our leader, Jesus.” This one woman is compared to the leader in Exodus who first attacked the Jews fleeing to Israel from Egypt. That she is the final convert may be seen as a parallel to the destruction of the Amalekites whose name was to be forever expunged from history.

⁵⁴ Bradbury 1996: 121

⁵⁵ This is reminiscent of the psychological torment experienced by Judith in the tale of *Judith and Aseneth* before she converts to Judaism.

⁵⁶ *Et cum in consummatione orationis 'Amen' populus inclamasset, illa credere et se Christianam fieri velle subiunxit. 27.7*

praying and singing. We have seen before, however, that violent things sometimes occur while the Christians are praying (e.g. the burning of the synagogue, the terror inspired in the Jews after the debate, etc.) in the letter.⁵⁷ Even if she agreed merely in order to get them out of her house, this is still a form of coercion that is masked behind religious devotion and prayer.

The next day, Severus and the other Christians who accompanied him prepared to return to Jamona. They were convinced at this point that all of the Jews had converted. They were surprised, therefore, when Innocentius' sister-in-law approached them because they knew she had boarded a ship to leave the island when she realized that Innocentius had converted. In fact, Severus mentioned that when she boarded the ship, there had been no attempt to stop her from leaving. Rather, they had encouraged her to go because there was no way to convince her to convert.⁵⁸ However, she was driven back to shore when she tried to leave. Now she approaches Severus and wraps her arms around his legs like a suppliant begging to convert. Bewildered, he asks her why she had wished to abandon her brethren in the first place. She replies that even Jonah wished to flee from the face of God.⁵⁹ She adds that he did however fulfil God's will albeit unwillingly. Thus, she is very much like Jonah herself because she fled from conversion in the beginning but, after unwillingly returning to the island, she then converted and offered her two daughters for conversion as well. This, of course, had been God's intention all along as Severus indicated before he began recounting the tales of the three women.

After the conversion of these last women, Severus brings the letter to its conclusion. He reports that five hundred and forty Jews joined the church during the eight days he was

⁵⁷ Indeed such divinely inspired violence after prayer is not unique to the *Letter*. See, for example *3Maccabees*. An important part of the discourse here is that the violence is inspired by God and not simply the earthly agents.

⁵⁸ *navem ascendit, non solum permittentibus verum etiam suadentibus nobis, quia ad fidem Christi nec verbis nec miraculis flecteretur* 26.2

⁵⁹ *'Et Ionas', inquit, 'propheta a facie Domini fugere voluit, et tamen voluntatem Domini licet invitus implevit.'* 28.5

describing. He adds that he finds it important to report⁶⁰ so many Christians accompanied him on the thirty mile journey from Jamona to assist in the confrontation with the Jews. Since he does not name anyone in particular for helping him, his goal in reporting this fact cannot be to win favor for anyone. It seems possible then to consider that he wants it noted that he had a force of supporters with him when he made his attack. The accomplishment of so great a task would not have been possible without a large band of enforcers. This is all the more important when consider with the next segment of the letter in which he describes how the Jews themselves were responsible for tearing down the remains of the synagogue and building a new cathedral on its site. As Bradbury notes,

In cases of synagogue burning in the late 4th and early 5th cents., the issue of compensation was hotly disputed...The details of Ch. 31 reveal how tough Severus has been in negotiations with Theodorus and the other Jewish notables. Conversion was only part of the bargain.⁶¹

This reveals that a negotiation in fact must have occurred between them. There were hints of this in the conversation between Theodorus and Reuben but the results here seem to confirm it.

Including this at the end of the letter is a not so subtle reminder to the reader of the way that negotiation should be used to persuade conversion.

In a poetic closure to the letter, Severus returns for a moment to some of the earlier imagery he employed at the beginning.

Illud magis mirum magisque gaudendum est, quod ipsam Iudaicae plebis terram diu inertem, nunc autem recissis incredulitatis vepribus et recepto verbi semine, multiplicem fructum iustitiae germinare conspiciamus, ita ut nobis in spe tantorum novalium gaudeamus. (30.1)

We must rejoice more for that rather marvelous thing that we see the land itself of the Jewish people, which was inert for a long time but now after the thorns of unbelief have been cut back and the seed of the word has been taken in, it produces a multitude of the fruit of justice. And so let us rejoice in the hope of such cultivated land.

⁶⁰ *Inane autem et supervacuum non reor ut... commemorem* 29.3

⁶¹ Bradbury 1996: 130, note 25

No longer is the countryside inhospitable and bearing poisonous snakes and scorpions. The wolves and foxes are gone. The geography he described at the beginning has changed. And in fulfilment, at last, of Theodora's and Severus' dreams, the barren fields which were offered to him have been planted and are producing.

Having brought closure to all of the elements he introduced, he also closes the frame of the narrative with a valediction. He includes a formal ending⁶² and the date of the events. He follows this with a polite exhortation for others to imitate his actions.

Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter admittitis, zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorundem perpetua salute suscipite. Forsitan enim iam illud praedictum ab Apostolo venit tempus, ut plenitudine gentium ingressa omnis Israel salvus fiat. Et fortasse hanc ab extremo terrae scintillam voluit Dominus excitari, ut universus orbis terrarum caritatis flagraret incendio ad exurendam infidelitatis silvam. (31.2-4)

For which reason if you respectfully accept the word of an unworthy sinner, take up the zeal of Christ against the Jews but on account of their eternal salvation. For perhaps the time predicted by the Apostle has come already so that all of Israel with the plenitude of the people having entered will be saved. And perhaps the Lord wants this spark to be ignited from the end of the earth so that the entire world will flare with the fire of love to burn down the forest of disbelief.

There can be no doubt after reading his final lines that this letter is in truth a call for action.

Severus, as elsewhere, uses biblical reference⁶³ to support his argument and suggests that it is in accordance with God's will. Although his claim at the beginning of the letter was that he wanted to relate the events to avoid concealing Christ's miracles, the ending of the letter does not stop with that. The journey from beginning to end has carefully laid out a strategy for forcing conversion on the Jews. The feeling that Severus wants his audience to have at the end of the letter is enthusiasm to go forth and save the Jews, not wonder at the things God has done. The

⁶² *Haec Beatitudo vestra...cognoscat* 31.1

⁶³ *illud praedictum ab Apostolo venit tempus*

riot which erupted at Uzalis when the letter was read before a Christian congregation⁶⁴ is evidence that he was able to achieve his goal.

⁶⁴ The riot is mentioned in the *Liber de miraculis sancti Stephani protomartyris* by Evodius. (Ginsburg 1996: 210)

Chapter 2: Characters

As rhetorical tools, all characters are important in revealing the discourse that the implied author projects. Since they are constructs of the implied author they can be used to present or obscure details. They act both as portrayals of individuals and ideological agents that represent classes or groups of people and their identities. Thus they provide as much insight into the thoughts of the implied author as they reveal events of the story. In the case of the *Epistula Severi*, it is more beneficial for understanding the discourse to examine the characters as literary constructs rather than to consider their historicity. In other words, unlike other studies which attempt to establish the historicity of the characters and their actions, I will study them as artificial constructs of the author's work to see what they reveal about the narrative point of view of the author.

Severus the narrator (and Severus the implied author)

There are three Severuses in the *Epistula Severi*: the flesh-and-blood author¹ of the text, the narrator of the story who calls himself *Severus episcopus* in the opening sentence, and the implied author who crafts the letter in the way in which it appears. The flesh-and-blood author is the least important to us in this study because he exists outside the text and we are therefore unable to know him or gain direct access to him in our reading. The historical context in which he lived and wrote are important and we shall return to those later. For now, however, I will focus on the other two since delineating them is essential for understanding the letter.

¹ Bradbury (1996: 57-69) makes a strong case that the letter was in fact a collaborative effort between Severus and Consentius. If this is true, then the implied author is clearly a distinct entity created by the joint work of the two flesh-and-blood authors. In either case, it is a basic tenet of rhetorical narrative criticism to keep those two entities distinct.

Distinguishing between the narrator, Severus, and the implied author, Severus, is complicated by the fact that this narrative is presented as a letter. Part of the fiction is that the character called Severus who narrates the events is supposed to represent the author.

Character narration...is an art of indirection: an author communicates to her audience by means of the character narrator's communication to a narratee. The art consists in the author's ability to make the single text function effectively for its two audiences (the narrator's and the author's, or to use the technical terms, the narratee and the authorial audience) and its two purposes (author's and character narrator's) while also combining in one figure (the "I") the roles of both narrator and character. Even when the "I" which is the author appears to be identical with the "I" who is the narrator...that "I" will sometimes speak from the perspective of her former self, thereby making the communication shift from the direct to the indirect.²

The narrator in the *Epistula* is a literary creation depicted as writing a letter to an ambiguous audience in which he relates the events which occurred on Minorca. He claims that he is reporting the events because it would be wrong not to do so and that it would amount to a failure of exclaiming the glorious deeds of God. His stated goal is simple and straight forward. There is a more complex motive behind the letter, however, and that is the discourse of the implied author. Much of it is hidden in the words and descriptions of the narrator. Occasionally the narrator directly states the implied author's goal (e.g. He declares that the revelation of the column of light and the rain of honey signifies that the Jews are to be converted throughout the world 20.19-21). More frequently, however, he simply reports events which the reader must interpret to get the deeper meaning. The more that the author convinces us that both Severuses are the same person, the more we are likely to accept his worldview, which is, ultimately, what he wants us to do. Therefore, to a certain (although not the greatest) degree, the mimetic function of the character is important in this narrative.

Severus the narrator invites us into the narrative by addressing the letter to a fictional but all-inclusive audience:

² Phelan 2004: 1

Sanctissimis ac beatissimis dominis episcopis, presbyteris, diaconibus et universae fraternitati totius orbis terrarum, Severus episcopus misericordia Dei indigens et omnium ultimus in Christo Redemptore nostro aeternam salutem. (1.1)

To the most holy and blessed lord bishops, presbyters, deacons, and the entire brotherhood of the whole world, Severus the bishop last of all and unworthy of God's mercy sends an eternal greeting in Christ our redeemer.

The all-encompassing nature of this address has caused consternation for some historians.³ The appearance of the letter is stylistically convincing, but the audience addressed is not. Which are the most holy and blessed bishops, presbyters, and deacons? Who is this universal brotherhood of the whole world? Severus sends a greeting to someone but we are left to wonder who in fact it is. This is the voice of the implied author who, for rhetorical purposes, makes decisions about what to include and what to exclude as well as how to say things. On the one hand, he loses an element of mimetic plausibility because we realize the audience to whom the letter is directed is fictional or, at least, ambiguous. However, and perhaps more importantly, the implied author actively invites the reader to become part of the audience by creating the vague group of the universal brotherhood.

One way that the implied author influences the reader's apprehension of the text is by insisting that the reader adopt a point of view consistent with that of the narrative...Here we are concerned with what scholars call the evaluative point of view, which governs a work in general. This refers to the norms, values, and general worldview that the implied author establishes as operative for the story. To put it another way, evaluative point of view may be defined as the standards of judgment by which readers are led to evaluate the events, characters, and settings that comprise the story.⁴

We who are reading (or hearing) the letter are not one of the earlier mentioned parties in the opening but we can be and are encouraged to assume the role of members of the universal brotherhood. Unless we actively choose not to associate ourselves with that group we have

³ Blumenkrantz, in particular. However, Bradbury (1996: 12, footnote 20) convincingly argues against that point and cites examples of other broad salutations in letters (e.g. Eusebius) and claims that Severus is imitating those.

⁴ Powell 1991: 23-24

already made the first step in becoming part of the authorial audience of the narrative, which is what the implied author wants.

Following his salutation, the narrator provides a Biblical quotation from Tobit. The expressed motive is to explain that he must report the events on the island in accordance with Archangel Raphael's admonition that it is honorable to reveal and relate the works of God (1.1). Yet Severus claims, based on that suggestion, it is dangerous to try to conceal such deeds. This is not a logical conclusion: the first idea does not lead to the second. It is likely that instead this is again the voice of the implied author justifying to his audience the rationale for his action. He continues to do so throughout the letter. The pattern he introduces in the beginning paragraph of the letter creates the framework for the rest. Although the narrator makes attempts (perhaps too many) to convince his audience he is merely a reporter of events, his illogical conclusions and biased comments are more representative of the ideology of the overly zealous implied author. There is occasionally a clash between the communication of the narrator and the implied author who are each addressing a separate audience.

... the standard rhetorical approach to character narration is to assume that the narrator directly addresses the narratee and, through that direct address, the implied author indirectly addresses the authorial audience. ... we should refine this description, because the technique reveals that the implied author's indirect address to the authorial audience can interfere with the narrator's direct address to the narratee. This potential for interference, in turn, suggests that communication in character narration occurs along at least two tracks – the narrator -narratee track, and the narrator-authorial audience track. Along the narrator -narratee track, the narrator acts as a reporter, interpreter, and evaluator of the narrated for the narratee, and those actions are constrained by the narrative situation (a character narrator, for example, cannot enter the consciousness of another character); let us call these actions "narrator functions." Along the narrator-authorial audience track, the narrator unwittingly reports information of all kinds to the authorial audience (the narrator does not know that an authorial audience exists); let us call this reporting "disclosure functions." Let us call both sets of functions "telling functions," and understand them as distinct from the "character functions" of a character narrator, the ways in which characters work as representatives of possible people (what I have called their mimetic function), as representative of larger groups for ideas (their

thematic functions), and as artificial constructs within the larger construct of the work (their synthetic functions).⁵

In short, the implied author sacrifices the mimetic function of his characters in favor of promoting their thematic functions. The result is that the letter suffers on the level of the synthetic functions. In turn, this makes the letter less convincing to an audience as a letter but potentially more forceful as a vehicle for promoting an anti-Jewish discourse. Failure on a synthetic level may make a narrative less appealing to a flesh-and-blood audience unless the thematic level is strong enough to move the audience to overlook it.

Regardless of the final success of the letter in achieving its goal, the study of Severus the narrator as a character is essential to understanding the goal of the implied author. “Since characters are shaped by their authors to attain certain ends and effects, it makes perfect sense to inquire why and to what end they endowed their characters with this particular selection of features.”⁶ Severus reveals his view of the world from the first paragraph: the narrator views there to be only right and wrong (or good things and bad things). He focuses on this theme throughout the letter. From his descriptions of the geography of the island to the social conditions of the Jews versus the Christians, he repeatedly shows that there are two opposing sides. The narrator makes it clear from the start that he is incapable of viewing the world in any other way. This is significant for a number of reasons. Since the narrator, like the implied author, sees the world in only black and white terms, the entire narrative assumes that view (i.e. that evaluative point of view). The implied author could have adopted a more nuanced style of narration that included a version of Severus the narrator that was more open to other perspectives and thus related events in a less oppositional manner. The result of the story would not have changed since he is allegedly narrating a historical event which was knowable to his audience.

⁵ Phelan 2004:12-13

⁶ Margolin in Herman 2007: 68

Such a depiction would have been more balanced. Mimetically and synthetically it might have been more appealing. But it might also have lost some of the thematic force. The discourse of this letter overshadows its narrativity. Through this depiction of Severus, the implied author makes it manifest that the message he is delivering is more important than other elements. The purpose of the letter is not to relate events but to send a message of force and opposition.

Furthermore, the other characters in the story are all portrayed through the focalization of Severus. Thus the narrator both tells us about them and relates their experiences through his own perspective. He tells us what they do, say, and think. And then he interprets those actions, words, and thoughts for us. No one in this narration has a voice except for the narrator. This calls into question his reliability as a narrator and how that affects the reader. At the same time, if the implied author successfully convinces the authorial audience to sympathize with Severus, he directs the audience to adopt Severus' point of view which remains fiercely black and white. The perspective of binary opposition, good versus evil, Christian versus Jew, is a clear message from the implied author to the implied audience. The character Severus, as narrator, conveys that message well and consistently throughout.

Severus the narrator portrays himself as humble and self-deprecating. In the salutation, he describes himself as “unworthy of God’s mercy and least worthy of all people”.⁷ This could reasonably be viewed as a mere formality since he is addressing lofty recipients but he continues throughout the letter with such sentiment. For example, when he mentions that he had recently become the bishop of Minorca, he calls himself the least of all mortal men.⁸ When he discusses Orosius’ arrival on Minorca at that time, he says he acquired his position although he was

⁷ *misericordia Dei indigens et omnium ultimus in Christo Redemptore nostro*

⁸ *omnium mortalium ultimo* 2.6

unworthy.⁹ In the descriptions of the dreams he relates later, he says in one that he enjoys the position of priesthood not by his own merit but because of divine generosity¹⁰ and in another he was summoned by Christ although he is the last of all sinners.¹¹ Still later, when the Jews asked to be baptized by him, he says he is an unworthy shepherd.¹² Even toward the end of the letter when discussing the signs which appeared in the sky he states that he lacks the skill to describe them eloquently.¹³ There is surely a formulaic aspect to these descriptions but it occurs often enough to make it noticeable to the reader. Yet it also is part of his program of establishing binary oppositions. Severus, the humble Christian leader is diametrically opposed to Theodorus, the aristocratic leader of the Jews.

Oddly, it is only after all of the description of the geography and the towns, the introduction of Theodorus, the arrival of the relics and subsequent preparation for conflict, and the first dream sequence that Severus narrates events in which he claims to have been directly involved. The active image he presents of himself is in sharp contrast to the humble, self-deprecating man he appears elsewhere. Upon arriving in Magona with the Christians from Jamona, he summons the Jews: "Therefore we arrived in Magona, and immediately, having sent clerics, I announced my arrival to the Jews and I demanded that they do the honor to come to the church."¹⁴ His behavior is swift and imperious. He acts immediately (*pervenimus, statimque*) upon arriving. Like a king or other magistrate, he announces his arrival to the Jews by messengers (in this case, clerics) he sent to them. And he demands that they meet him at the church, his seat of authority. When the Jews refuse to come because it is the Sabbath, Severus,

⁹ *ego tanti sacerdoti nomen, licet indignus, adeptus sum* 4.1

¹⁰ *qui non pro merito sed pro divini muneris largitate sacerdotio fungor* 10.2

¹¹ *me quoque ultimum omnium peccatorum* 11.3

¹² *a me...indigno pastore* 17.2

¹³ *cum eloqui digne non valeam, silere non audio* 20.1

¹⁴ *Igitur Magonam pervenimus, statimque ego missis clericis adventum meum Iudaeis nuntiavi, et ut ad ecclesiam succedere dignarentur poposci* 12.3

unwilling to compromise, demands again that they meet but at the synagogue instead.¹⁵ He further says that he was not forcing them to engage in any physical activity¹⁶ which violates their custom but planned to have peaceful conversation about the interpretation of the law.¹⁷ While this is dismissive of their customs and reveals a lack of sensitivity or desire to be sensitive, he adds insult to injury by insinuating that the Jews might be planning some scheme to avoid the conversation since otherwise they would be willing to meet him. He then demands that they show him which law they would be breaking by complying.¹⁸ As an initial attempt at diplomacy, this is a failure: the Jews flatly reject his overtures at every turn.¹⁹

Severus' reliability as a narrator must be reviewed at this point. Narrators become unreliable when their narration either distorts or misrepresents the story they are relating. Technically speaking, narrators have three main tasks to fulfill: report about facts, characters, and events; interpret what they report; and ethically evaluate what they report.

When a narrator performs any of the three tasks inadequately (as measured against how the implied author would perform it), then we have unreliable narration. But narrators can be inadequate in two main ways: by distorting things or by failing to go far enough. Consequently, narrators can be unreliable by misreporting, misinterpreting, and misevaluating (in these cases readers need to reject the narrator's version and, if possible, replace it with another one) and by underreporting, underreading, and underevaluating (in these cases readers need to supplement the narrator's version).²⁰

Severus follows up the rejection of his demands by the Jews with the declaration that in the end they came together to meet him at the house where he was staying because they had been "driven by fear of that Lion"²¹. No further explanation of the statement is given. Severus the narrator has underreported the situation and the audience is left to fill in the missing information. We can

¹⁵ *Rursus ego expetivi ut me ad synagogam, si mallent, opperirentur...* 12.5

¹⁶ *utique eos a nobis in die sabbati ad opus servile compelli* 12.5

¹⁷ *futurum autem esse modestissimum de lege conflictum* 12.6

¹⁸ *aut, si non astute certamen fugerent sed simplicem afferrent excusationem, ostenderent praeceptum quo in die festo sermonem his con ferre prohibitum sit.* 12.6

¹⁹ *Ad haec cum illi in omnibus contradictionem obstinatissimam retulissent* 12.7

²⁰ Phelan and Rabinowitz in Herman 2012: 34

²¹ *tandem illius leonis terrore compulsi, ad domum in qua hospitio accesseram confluerunt* 12.7

infer from the earlier dream sequence (which also mentions fear and the Lion) that it is a reference to Christ as the Lion of God. (In fact, the image is repeated again later in the narration under similar contexts.) But in what manner did fear of that Lion compel the Jews to go to Severus' house? It is a dramatic change of position for them considering they had refused the invitation at least three times already. Why does Severus the narrator not tell us what occurred? Why mention it in the first place but not explain it? This is a significant detail missing from the narration which should be considered as a sign of the implied author's discourse. "...an event that was important and took a long time on the level of the story may go unmentioned in the narrative. This is called an ellipsis, and it may have various ideological meanings."²²

Two motivations are likely. Severus the narrator is trying to be discreet. He wants to convey truthfully the events that allegedly occurred but he does not want to risk putting the blame on himself for anything done that may have been illegal or hostile. We know from legal documents like the Theodosian Code that forced coercion of the Jews was illegal at the time.²³ It would not be wise for Severus to document in his letter that he had ignored the law and forced the Jews to come to him. He hints at the second motivation with the suggestion of the fear caused by the Lion. Here the implied author has created a gap in the narrator's account that the audience needs to fill in order to understand what happened. Severus' underreporting has provided us with enough information to know something is missing. His underevaluation of the situation signals to us that the Jews changed their minds through fear of violence. The image of the Lion completes the picture by informing us that the fear was promoted by the Christians themselves. The discourse of the story is clear for the first time: the Jews can be frightened and coerced as long as

²² Herman, Luc and Vervaeck in Herman 2007: 225

²³ Bradbury 1996: 54

you don't directly make it visible. Like the establishment of binary oppositions, the unspoken use of violence and intimidation is a pattern throughout the rest of the letter.

It is certain that the implied author has made conscious choices about employing such rhetorical techniques. In the opening paragraph of the letter, he makes the standard claim of many ancient writers that his account will be simple and straight forward without embellishment.

Celatur enim quodammodo speciosissima pulchritudo virtutis, si abundantiori eloquio circumlita fuerit ac fucata. ego quoque magnalia, quae apud nos Christus operatus est, Beatitudini vestrae non compto sed veridico sermone referre aggrediar. (1. 2)

For somehow the most attractive beauty of virtue is hidden, if with too excessive eloquence it has been smeared or painted. I also will undertake to relate to your Blessedness the great deeds which Christ has performed among us with speech that is truthful and not embellished.

He asserts that he will use speech that is truthful rather than artful (*non compto sed veridico sermone*) because the beauty of virtue is masked when it is made-up with too much eloquence (*celatur...fucata*). Yet the description he produces is itself embellished with excessive imagery of make-up. From the start he wants us to see that he knows how to use rhetoric while claiming not to use it.²⁴ Likewise, in the latter section, he wants to show the audience that it is permissible to use coercion as long as it remains artfully hidden.

Severus reveals that he is aware of the danger of breaking Roman law when he confronts the Jews at his home. He again accuses them of sedition for gathering weapons and seems shocked that they should behave in such a manner **in a city governed by Roman rule**.²⁵ The mention of Roman law immediately after concealing the probable violence used to bring the

²⁴ This is a common technique in classical writing and typical of introductions in many writers throughout classical literature. To name just a couple examples, Catullus begins his collection with a self-deprecating description of his *libellus* which he says is filled with nonsense (*nugas* 1.4) although he clearly does not believe that and presents the introduction in an artistic flourish; Apuleius assures his readers that he seeks merely to delight them with his tales (*lector intende; laetaberis*. 1.1) when his story is in fact far more sophisticated than the Milesian tales he pretends to recount (*Milesio varias fabulas* 1.1).

²⁵ "There I said, 'Brothers, why, I ask, have you collected heaps of rocks and all other sorts of weapons as if against bandits especially in a city under Roman laws?' " *Ibi ego, 'quaeso', inquam, 'fratres, quare quasi adversum latrones praesertim in civitate Romanis legibus subdita acervos saxorum omniaque armorum genera congregastis ?* 12.8

Jews to his home is not likely coincidental. At the same time, he has shifted the focus of the blame away from himself by implying that the Jews were illegally stockpiling weapons. The violent imagery which follows also cleverly disguises any suggestion of coercion by Christians since it portrays the Jews as violent and the Christians as peaceful.

Nos codices ad docendum detulimus, vos ad occidendum gladios ac vectes. Nos acquirere cupimus, vos perdere desideratis. Non est, quantum arbitror, aequum ut tam varia lite alterutrum laboremus. Vos veto, ut video, sititis nostrum sanguinem, nos vestram salutem.

We have brought books for teaching, you have brought swords and clubs for killing. We desire to increase, you wish to destroy. It is not, as far as I consider, equal how we are undertaking such different tasks on each side. As I see it, you thirst for our blood, and we for your safety. (12.10)

At the same time, it continues the pattern of binary oppositions: the Christians brought books to teach, the Jews brought weapons to kill; the Christians want to gain, the Jews to destroy; the Christians desire salvation for the Jews, whereas the Jews thirst for Christian blood. The implied author has used Severus' speech to plant the seed of violent coercion but keep the audience focused on the hostile and negative view of the Jews who are the opposite of the peaceful, benevolent Christians. The irony, of course, is that the Jews are actually the weaker group. If they truly had weapons they might have used them to defend themselves from that terrible "Lion" that forced them to Severus' house. Instead, they were bullied into going there.

The implied author seems acutely aware of the possibility that his implied audience might not believe him. As a result, Severus the narrator repeatedly tries to convince them by asserting the truth of what he is telling to his narrative audience (the narratee). However, his evidence is mostly based on hearsay or rumor. For example, he claims that Jamona is inhospitable to Jews and that this fact is so well known that the Jews don't even bother to try and live there

anymore.²⁶ When he relates the first dream sequence, he states that it occurred thirty days before the conversions and that he had told his brothers about it even though he had not known its significance at the time.²⁷ Likewise, Severus reports, Theodorus told his dream to several Jews, a well-respected kinswoman, and even a number of Christians before the events came to pass.²⁸ When describing the strange events which led to the conversion of Meletius and Innocentius, Severus makes it a point to say he found out about them from very faithful and honest men.²⁹ In case that was not sufficient, he adds that they themselves would swear a strong oath it was true even now.³⁰ Similarly, when Severus describes the prodigies near the end of the letter he mentions several different sources that reported them to him. The light in the sky was not only seen by the two monks who reported it to Severus but also by certain women, remarkable because they were still Jews at the time and one of them was a relative of Meletius whose story was told earlier.

Mulieres autem quaedam tunc Iudaeae, inter quas matrona Meletii illius cuius supra mentio habita est, de cenaculo prospicientes, ita sibi id ipsum visum esse confirmabant, quasi supra basilicam decidisset (20.11)

And even beyond that, Severus found out that the signs had also been seen by his brethren in Jamona on the other side of the island!³¹ He finally concludes that the column of light appeared before the gaze of many people whom God judged worthy of seeing it.³² The constant attempts to support his story with rumors and hearsay undermine the authority of the character. A bishop writing to his superiors about a successful campaign to unify the Christians and the Jews in his

²⁶ *adeo ut celebris huius rei fama ipsis quoque Iudaeis, ne id ultra temptare audeant, metum fecerit.* 3.2

²⁷ *Hoc somnium ... ante triginta ferme quam impleretur dies, et vidisse nos et, licet absolutionem eius ignoraremus, tamen fratribus indicasse manifestum est.* 10.6

²⁸ *Theodorus...somnia quod viderat non solum Iudaeis sed etiam propinquae cuidam matrifamilias primariae ipsius civitatis multisque etiam Christianis, ante non parvum quam impleretur* 11.2

²⁹ *quod tamen a fidelissimis probatissimisque viris comperimus* 18.3

³⁰ *sicut ipsi etiam nunc cum sacramentorum terribili interpositione confirmant* 18.4

³¹ *Utrumque autem signum etiam Iamonae consistentibus fratribus revelatum fuisse cognovimus.* 20.18

³² *et columna candidissimi illius luminis multorum (quos dignos Dominus iudicavit) se ingressit aspectibus* 20.19

diocese should not need to resort to rumors as evidence of his success. On the contrary, it seems more suspicious as if he is trying to conceal something. The fears of the implied author are thus expressed in his narrator's words.

Theodorus

According to the narrator, Theodorus is everything that Severus is not. He is first introduced in the letter as learned, noble, and influential. The people of the town rely on him.

Iudaeorum populus maxime cuiusdam Theodori auctoritate atque peritia nitebatur, qui non solum inter Iudaeos verum etiam inter Christianos eiusdem oppidi, et censu et honore saeculi praecipuus erat. Siquidem apud illos legis doctor et, ut ipsorum utar verbo, pater pateron fuit. In civitate autem cunctis curiae muniis exsolutis, et defensor iam extiterat et etiam nunc patronus municipum habetur. (6.1-2)

He holds titles both among the Jews (*pater pateron fuit*) as a religious leader and among the townspeople as a whole (*In civitate...habetur*), holding municipal office. Remarkably, it is not only the Jews but the Christians as well who rely on him (*non solum...Christianos*). Specifically, Severus later makes reference to his strength on which the entire synagogue depend.³³ Indeed his authority is so great that it quells the Christians' enthusiasm for violence for a while³⁴ although it is not able to completely extinguish it.

It is obvious from the start that Theodorus and Severus are meant to be viewed as opposites. The lofty versus the lowly status, Jew versus Christian, etc. are all part of the implied author's discourse. Some of the descriptors are clear: we learn early on that they live in different cities on opposite sides of the island. Others are more subtle yet rhetorically significant. For example, after Severus tells us about the preparations for the conflict, he provides the first dream sequence. (There are several dreams and miracles which act as portents of the events and they

³³ *Theodorus in cuius se omnis synagoga viribus acclinabat* 7.1

³⁴ *auctoritate sua multos terruit et non extinxit sed paululum sopivit contentionis incendium* 7.2

will be discussed in more detail later.) However it should be noted here that Severus recounts dreams from two sources in this instance, Christians and a Jew. The first dream belonged to a woman named Theodora and it is told in connection with one that Severus himself had. In fact, Severus equates the two as having the same meaning.³⁵ He then relates the other dream which Theodorus had. Between the first introduction of Theodorus as a character and now, Severus has not mentioned him again. He reappears here in a parallel dream sequence which highlights once more how he and Severus are opposites.

Severus explicitly draws a connection between himself and Theodorus through the figure of the Christian matron, Theodora, who had the first dream.³⁶ The similar names are not a coincidence to Severus: it was by wondrous order of divine will that she and he have the same name. Curiously, Theodora is the only named female character in the letter who is a Christian; all other named women are Jewish. Severus the narrator may have invented the name (as it seems he did for some of the other characters in the narrative) and even the character herself for rhetorical purposes. Why mention her and her dream at all if it is identical to his? It is possible his intent was to highlight the diametrically opposed version of Theodorus as the proper version. In his current guise, as the male leader of the Jews, he is in charge but living a destructive life. His transformation to become secondary to Severus will require a completely new version of himself that is no longer a challenge to Severus but rather will hold a lower and obviously subservient position.³⁷ The parallel nature of the set of dreams reinforces this rhetorical notion. The

³⁵ *Hoc somnium utriusque unum est* 10.6

³⁶ “Among the Jews and also by the strange order of divine directive that the name of Theodora and my duty were brought together in one man. Theodorus, who was the highest priest of that wicked people...” *Apud Iudaeos quoque miro divinae dispensationis ordine ut et nominis Theodorae et officii mei in uno homine societas conveniret. Theodorus, qui summus sacerdos perfidi populi...* 11.1-2

³⁷ Kraemer (2009) discusses the way in which gender roles are portrayed to illustrate improper behavior of women and men among the Jews. Jewish women are shown to be disrespectful of their husbands and Jewish men are subordinate to their wives prior to their conversion to Christianity. Susanna Drake also looks at gender role attacks against Jews in Christian discourse in *Slandering the Jew*.

Christian dreams are active. In each, a Jewish figure approaches Severus and asks to be claimed by him for the church. Theodorus' dream, on the other hand, is passive. He is prevented from entering the synagogue by Christians and eventually frightened into joining the Church. Severus interprets each set of dreams to mean the same thing, viz. that the Jews will ask to convert. Thus he arranges them to appear like opposite sides of the same coin. Even the highly ornamental language he uses in this section (the synchysis of *miro divinae dispensationis ordine* and the alliteration in *summus sacerdos perfidi populi* are good examples) alert the reader to the artifice of the passage. The reader is not meant to take this literally. The juxtaposition of the dreams and the characters they represent are programmatic of the discourse.

Theodorus' erudition and knowledge of the law are indirectly manifest in the narrative. Severus mentions them when he first describes Theodorus but we witness them later. When the Jews meet with the Christians to debate after the destruction of the synagogue, Theodorus proves to be more skillful in arguing than Severus. However, rather than admitting that Theodorus knew more or spoke better, Severus says that Theodorus mocked and perverted all the arguments he was making. We know that Theodorus was winning because the Christians saw that he could not be defeated by human words and resorted to praying for divine assistance against him.

Ibi Theodorus cum audacter de lege contendens omnia quae obiciebantur irrideret atque perverteret, populus Christianus videns quia verbis superari non posset humanis, auxilium de caelo imploravit. (16.3)

And their prayers were answered: aid was sent "by the wondrous mercy of the most indulgent Lord".³⁸ This allows for us to see what a formidable opponent Theodorus is without conceding that Severus lost. Instead, we see that the faith of the Christians and the support of divine will are greater than the best of the Jews. As with the instance of coercion above, Severus the narrator

³⁸ *Mira indulgentissimi Domini misericordia, adhuc parva petebantur, et iam maiora concesserat* 16.5

directs the reader away from the conclusion he wants to avoid toward the one he prefers the audience to see.

In the resulting chaos which ensues at this point in the narrative, Theodorus stands stunned.³⁹ Abandoning all pretense of reporting facts, Severus tells us what Theodorus is thinking: he saw the divine will being fulfilled among his people.⁴⁰ This is immediately followed by a quotation from Proverbs 28:1,⁴¹ *'Fugit impius nemine persequente'*: “the impious man flees with no one pursuing him”. It is not clear if that is Theodorus’ thought or Severus’ commentary. In either case, Severus responds with his own reaction to the situation, stating that rather than no one pursuing them, that terrible Lion chases them.⁴² Theodorus’ dream has come true. In fact, he is standing on the very spot from the dream and again hears the same monks singing as he had in his sleep.⁴³ Theodorus is badly affected by the situation: he grows pale and loses his voice.⁴⁴ The situation has changed greatly from the start of the scene. Theodorus, who was once in command of his people and capable of winning in any argument against Severus and the Christians, has been left abandoned and stands frightened and vulnerable. At this point it is difficult to believe there is not violence and coercion occurring and that the Lion symbolizes such.

Theodorus then agrees to convert. Filled with terror, he is approached by Reuben, another Jew who already converted after the destruction of the synagogue.⁴⁵ Recalling the dream again, Severus tells us that Reuben somehow seems to open to Theodorus the house of his faith to

³⁹ *Theodorus stupore percussus* 16.10

⁴⁰ *divinam sententiam in plebe sua cernebat impleri.* 16.10

⁴¹ Bradbury 1996: 99 *fugit impius nemine persequente iustus autem quasi leo confidens absque terrore erit* “The wicked flee with no one pursuing, but the righteous are as bold and without fear as a lion.”

⁴² *Sed tamen non 'nemine'! Persequebatur enim eos ille leo terribilis* 16.11

⁴³ *Stabat igitur Theodorus in loco prorsus eodem quo ei pridem per somnium terror leonis fuerat iniectus...tantum psallentes monachos intuebatur* 16.11

⁴⁴ *Quem cum horribili formidine adprehensum, et non solum colore vultus verum etiam vocis officio destitutum* 16.12

⁴⁵ “When that most holy Rueben had caught sight of him, he drew near him and coaxing the trembling man with soft speech, he was encouraging him toward faith in Christ.” *quem cum...Ruben ille sanctissimus aspexisset, propere accessit et trementem blando sermone compellans ad fidem Christi cohortabatur* 16.12

which he was fleeing with fear of the Lion.⁴⁶ This is a poetic way of describing the conversion of a man who is terrified into abandoning his customs and beliefs. It also glosses over what must have really happened.

Severus, recognizing the improbability of Theodorus' conversion in this way, addresses his audience directly again to assert that what he is saying is true.

Verumtamen ut et nos universa fideliter narremus et vos, qui non eloquii ornatum sed veritatem quaeritis, libentius audiat, ipsius Ruben verba inserens nihil ex simplicitate dictorum eius subtraham. (16.13)

Nevertheless, so that we might relate all the details faithfully and so you who seek the truth rather than the ornaments of eloquence might listen more enthusiastically, including the words of Reuben himself I will leave out none of the candor of his words.

It is an awkward moment for such an interruption. It breaks the tension of the narrative at a rather dramatic moment. The focus has been on Theodorus and his actions and feelings. This reminds us that we are in fact listening to Severus, the implied author. It does not add to the suspense of what happens because he just told us of Reuben's success in converting Theodorus. Rather, it recalls the opening paragraph of the letter in which he said the beauty of virtue is hidden by the use of too much eloquence (1.2). In this context, it seems likely that he is drawing our attention to his intentional use of rhetoric to avoid saying what he wants us to infer. In effect he tells the authorial audience that the Lion is not a lion and that it is important to listen enthusiastically in order to get the truth in what Reuben said to Theodorus.

The conversation which follows the interruption is not nearly as complex or frank as one is led to expect. It does reveal important information about Theodorus as a character, however, which in turn provides us with insight into the implied author.

Aiebat enim, 'Quid times, domine Theodore? Si vis certe et securus et honoratus et dives esse, in Christum crede, sicut et ego credidi. Modo tu stas et ego cum episcopis sedeo. Si credideris, tu sedebis et ego ante te stabo.' Hos Theodorus sermones alta mente

⁴⁶ domum fidei suae ad quam a leonis pavore confugeret quodammodo patefacere videbatur 16.12

suscipiens, ad nos ait, 'Faciam quod vultis. Tenete', inquit, 'promissionem hanc, sed permittite mihi ut prius alloquar plebem meam, ut maiorem conversionis meae etiam ex reliquis possim habere mercedem.' (16.14-16)

For (Reuben) said, “What are you afraid of, master Theodorus? If you truly want to be safe and honored and rich, believe in Christ, like I have believed. You are just now standing and I am sitting with the bishops. If you believe, you will sit (with them) and I will stand before you.” Taking up these words deep in his mind, he said to us, “I will do what you want. Take this as a promise, but allow me to speak to my people first so I can have even greater reward for my conversion from the others.

It is difficult to accept that the man who has just shown such prowess as a speaker could be so easily swayed. There are two ways that we can assess this exchange. First, we may conclude that Theodorus is so fearful for his own safety in that moment that he must agree. In this case, the threat hidden to the reader behind the symbol of the Lion must be quite overwhelming to Theodorus. The second option is to look at what Reuben offers Theodorus, viz. safety, honor, and riches (*securus honoratus et dives esse*). He further clarifies that Theodorus will gain a position among the bishops (*cum episcopis...tu sedebis*) if he joins them (*Christum crede*). In other words, he does not appeal to his religious beliefs or try to argue with him about interpretations of scripture. He offers him worldly benefits. However, they are not new benefits that he was lacking but rather a continuation of the same pleasures and status he already enjoys. Without much hesitation, Theodorus agrees to join the Christians. His only condition is that he himself be allowed to tell the Jews that he is converting. His motivation is that he wishes to increase his reward even more. As a character, Theodorus shows himself to be weak and greedy. While highly educated and a powerful speaker, he is interested more in his public status than his religious convictions. He seems eager to sell out his fellow Jews as long as he can maintain his position of authority.

How persuasive is this image of Theodorus? Curiously, Severus does not say that Theodorus would be willing still to support this claim as he has said about others in the letter. As

previously stated, the conversation is far shorter than what one expects after the interruption which precedes it. Severus does not tell us what Theodorus is thinking in that moment, as he did before when he stated that Theodorus perceived the divine spirit working among the Jews. Combining the implied violence with which Theodorus was threatened and the offer made by Reuben, it is likely that some kind of negotiation can be understood to have occurred. The details have been omitted. In keeping with the unreliable narration (underreporting) of Severus and the reminder (in the interruption passage) to pay attention to the rhetoric, the implied author has signaled that the audience must fill in the details. Surely a threat of violence or bodily injury was made; the appearance of the Lion confirms that. Also, Theodorus must have been told that failure to cooperate with the Christians would result in a loss of his status and possessions whereas agreeing to join them would not. In fact, the ease of his decision suggests that he was told there would be little or no change in his current situation if he agreed and was willing to convince other members of his community to join with him. That would explain why he wanted to talk with the Jews himself and expected greater rewards for doing so. Viewed this way, the conversation makes more sense to the reader. The character of Theodorus is still not admirable but he is understandable. It is important to remember, however, that he is only described to us through Severus' perception. We do not have a realistic representation of Theodorus as a person, we have Severus' rendition of what the Jewish leader was like. From elsewhere in the letter, we know he was established to be the opposite of Severus in all regards. In that sense, he is true to the image: Severus is unwavering in his belief and loyalty to his religion, Theodorus quickly abandons his faith and customs in pursuit of worldly comforts. Through this characterization of the Jews, the implied author has communicated to his audience that the Jews are not a loyal

people. The use of force and threat of violence accompanied by promise of safety and security is an effective combination to get them to abandon their ways and join the Christians.

Theodorus returned home happy from the encounter with Reuben and the Christians⁴⁷, or so Severus tells us. Yet he was also anxious⁴⁸ because he had not fully become Christian yet. From here on, he becomes a much less active character in the letter. He appears only three more times. The first is when Meletius, Theodorus' brother, and Innocentius arrive at his house after their ordeal in the wilderness. They are confused because they thought he had become a Christian and have just learned he is still a Jew.

Stupentes itaque et quod ipsis acciderat non credentes, ad domum Theodori gressus dirigunt; ubi cum eos iam paene exacto prandio ille excepisset, ilico inquit causam cur a se atque a civitate abscessissent, universumque ordinem gestae rei magis cum risu quam cum admiratione cognoscit. (18.25)

And so being shocked and not believing what had happened to them, they steered their steps to Theodorus' house. When he had received them there with lunch nearly finished, he asked them the reason why they had retreated from him and the city, and he learned the whole order of events more with a smile than with amazement.

This exchange is most curious because of the inclusion of the final detail. At this point, Theodorus has already sworn to join the Christians and been allowed time to talk to the Jews before he converts. Meletius and Innocentius, believing they were following his example, have also decided to convert. When they explain what brought them to their decision, he does not confide in them although Meletius is his brother. He hears the story of their hardship in the woods but is not amazed by what they tell him; he merely smiles. He, like Severus and the implied author, now knows more than the others but chooses to keep it concealed.

His next appearance is immediately after that when the scene moves ahead three days. Theodorus has gathered the Jews to try and convince them to convert.

⁴⁷ *Perrexit igitur Theodorus ad atrium suum quamlibet officio nostrorum laetus* 16.19

⁴⁸ *tamen anxietate non penitus carens* 16.19

Post triduum Theodorus cum contionari ad plebem suam eosque ad fidem Christi provocare disponeret , ultro se ad conversionem ingerentium Iudaeorum etiam seditionem pertulit . Nemo enim ferme eorum erat qui non se palam sensisse Christi potentiam contestaretur. (19.1-2)

Three days later Theodorus, when he was arranging a rally for his people to call them to faith in Christ, encountered a rebellion of Jews bringing themselves forth of their own accord for conversion. For there was almost not one of them who had not publically declared that he had felt the power of Christ.

This is extremely strange and further undermines Theodorus and his effectiveness as a leader. He has delayed the fulfilment of his pledge for three days so he could make time to win over the Jews. When he finally tries to do so, they have already decided on their own to convert because of their personal experiences with the power of Christ. We do not know whether this will affect the greater reward he was hoping to receive by convincing the Jews to join because Severus does not tell us. However the implied author hints in the passages which follow that the other Jews made decisions based on fear (e.g. both Galilaeus and Caecilianus mention threats against their lives). Theodorus has no other active role in that gathering which, perhaps, hints at his diminished role from this point forward.

His final appearance comes several passages later, after the description of some miracles. On the next day, Theodorus is reminded by many that he should fulfil his vow and convert. Severus explains that he had been hoping to delay until his wife returned from Majorca so he could convince her first.⁴⁹ The reaction of the people is mixed and unexpected:

Cum haec Theodorus Christianis iam acquiescentibus perorasset, Iudaeis qui conversi fuerant acerrima commotione consistentibus, amputata dilationis mora, ad matris propinquae sinum festinus ut viderat convolvavit; post quem omnis, tamquam remoto obice, ad ecclesiam synagoga conflavit. (21.3-4)

Theodorus, when he had brought this case to the Christians (who were) now acquiescing, and to the Jews, who had converted, persisting in a very bitter uproar, after the time of the

⁴⁹ See Kraemer (2009) for an interpretation of this. She shows how the gender roles are reversed in their marriage while they remain Jews and are not put into “proper” place until after they both convert.

delay was cut short, he quickly flew to the bosom of his kinswoman as he had seen; afterwards the entire synagogue flowed to the church as if an obstacle had been removed.

The Christians are perfectly willing to wait. The Jews who have converted however protest bitterly that he has not also joined them. At their insistence (and in the final fulfilment of his earlier dream), Theodorus rushes to the church to convert as seen by his flight to his kinswoman's bosom. The Christians have remained peaceful and accommodating while the Jews are the instigators of coercion. This may be an ironic twist in the story. Or it is a message that once the Christians force the Jews to start converting, it no longer requires coercion from them: the Jews will compel their own. Theodorus' final act threw open the flood gates and the converts willingly poured into the church to join.

Mirum dictu, inveterati illi legis doctores sine ulla altercatione verborum, sine ullo scripturarum certamine crediderunt. Tantum percunctati an vellent fidem Christi suscipere, credere se in Christum et Christianos statim fieri cupere profitebantur.
(21.5-6)

Wondrous to relate, those elderly scholars of the law, without any confrontation of words, without any struggle over scripture, believed. Having delayed so much whether they wanted to assume faith in Christ, they were publically declaring that they believed in Christ and that they wanted to become Christians immediately.

Theodorus' last act provides the impetus for the other Jewish leaders to also convert. He is not mentioned in the letter again.

Christians and Jews

There are not many named characters in the letter. Beyond Severus and Theodorus, there are seven others: Theodora, Reuben, Meletius, Innocentius, Galilaeus, Caecilianus, and Artemisia. All except the last have been mentioned at least once in the above discussion of Severus and Theodorus. All other people in the letter are either described but not named (e.g. the monks who saw the miraculous light, the women who threw the stones) or are part of a group

(e.g. the Christians from Jamona). Everyone who is mentioned or described is represented through Severus the narrator's perspective. Study of them therefore provides us with direct access to the implied author's view since he decides what the narrator tells us. As will be seen, the characters are seldom mimetically realistic. The insight that is provided by them often clashes with what a modern reader would expect for characters in the situations in the story. Instead, they become tools through which the implied author promotes his discourse to the authorial audience.

Several of the named characters are either fictitious or their names have been falsified for the sake of the text. For example, I mentioned above that Theodora is a feminized version of Severus' main opponent, Theodorus, and as such promotes the discourse of binary opposition. In introducing her, Severus indicates that her name is appropriate to her as a symbol of the church.⁵⁰

The word order here is significant. He makes note of her virginity (*virginitate corporis*), her religious intention (*religione propositi*) and the interpretation of her name (*nominis etiam interpretatione*). The first two qualities are written in the same order (i.e. ablative then genitive) whereas the last is reversed and separated by an adverb. The change in order highlights this quality among the three. It is this above the others that make her important. The significance is shown further at the start of the next section in which Theodorus is introduced formally.⁵¹ The previous section began *Apud nos*....The parallel wording helps to reinforce the diametrically opposed groups, "us" versus "the Jews". He states immediately that the coincidence of the names was created by the wondrous order of divine will (*miro divinae dispensationis ordine*). In other words, the names were chosen intentionally.

⁵⁰ *Apud nos devota quaedam et religiosissima nomine Theodora, quae et virginitate corporis et religione propositi et nominis etiam interpretatione typum portare ecclesiae meretur.* 10.1

⁵¹ *Apud Iudaeos quoque miro divinae dispensationis ordine ut et nominis Theodorae et officii mei in uno homine societas conveniret* (11.1)

Reuben is first mentioned by name in the recounting of Theodorus' dream. After relating the details, Severus claims that the meaning of the dream is very clear⁵² and he proceeds to explain most of it. The only detail he does not explain is who Reuben was and why Theodorus rushed to his home.⁵³ It is not that Severus cannot tell us the meaning but rather that he claims he did not know its meaning at that moment. He makes a point to say that he will explain it in the appropriate place (*Quod dehinc suo explicabimus loco*. 11.9). The next encounter with Reuben occurs on the day after the synagogue is burned. There we learn that Reuben was the first of the Jews to convert.⁵⁴ Severus tells us, however, that Reuben was chosen by God to be the first-born of all the Jews. The reason for his choosing, according to Severus, is so that consistency in names might be preserved in all things (*ut congruentia nominum in omnibus servaretur*). Severus draws a connection with Genesis 35:23 here when he subsequently states that Reuben immediately converted and thus became the "first-born of Jacob".⁵⁵ Finally, Reuben appears in the scene in which Theodorus agrees to convert. His role in the dream is explained at last because Theodorus rushes to him, like in the dream, and enters his house by vowing to become Christian. The whole sequence reduces Reuben to a symbolic character like Theodora. She was a symbol of the church and represents the opposition of the Jewish Theodorus and the Christian Severus. Reuben is a symbol of rebirth from Judaism to Christianity. He bears the name of the firstborn son of Jacob and he becomes the firstborn Christian from the Jews. On the one hand, this represents the subversion of Jewish history for a Christian purpose, in effect re-writing the Jewish past in a new Christian context.⁵⁶ On the other hand, he provides a model for conversion to the other Jews, especially Theodorus. These factors do not create a particularly believable

⁵² *Hoc eius somnium valde clarum est et interpretatione non indiget* 11.7

⁵³ *Illud ergo solum videbatur obscurum, quod in domum Ruben Iudaei cum a leone terreretur ingressus est* 11.9

⁵⁴ *postera siquidem die, ut congruentia nominum in omnibus servaretur, Ruben quidam Iudaeus a Domino ut primogenitus omnium constitueretur electus est.* (15.1)

⁵⁵ *Statimque 'primogenitus Iacob' factus, signum salutare suscepit* 15.3; Bradbury 1996: 95.

⁵⁶ See Jacobs (2003) for a detailed account of this process.

character. The narrator does not provide much insight into him or why he converted. He merely states that “with a most holy shout, he was begging to be freed from the chains of Jewish superstition”.⁵⁷ Once he had converted, he is fully associated with the Christians, always involved in their plans, and reproaching the stubbornness of the Jews with the other Christians.⁵⁸ It is difficult to accept that he would so easily have abandoned his own people or so readily shown hostility to them. His offer to Theodorus of worldly benefits for converting makes him less appealing to an audience that is neutral on the subject. Severus’ audience however would be more likely than a modern reader to accept the character’s ethical behavior. A character of this sort is appealing to an audience that is expecting or hoping for the Jews to convert.

A similar pattern emerges with the characters Meletius and Innocentius. Their story is told by Severus who, in turn, heard it from worthy witnesses.⁵⁹ After the confrontation between the Jews and the Christians when Theodorus met Reuben, the two men flee in fear from the city and go to a cave to hide. We learn that they are of noble birth and, in fact, Meletius is Theodorus’ brother.

Duo quidam primarii Iudaeorum, id est Meletius, Theodori frater, et Innocentius, qui Hispaniarum cladem nuper fugiens cum famulis suis ad hanc insulam venerat, sicut ipsi etiam nunc cum sacramentorum terribili interpositione confirmant, ad unam speluncam vel potius rupem convenerunt, associantibus se duobus quibusdam Iudaeis humili loco ortis, qui istos communis fugae principes legerant. (18.4)

Innocentius had recently come to the island as he was fleeing from Spain. Two Jews of lowly birth (*duobus quibusdam Iudaeis humili loco ortis*) fled to the cave with them. These two characters are then dismissed to go back to town and find out what is happening, leaving Meletius and Innocentius alone in the cave. The conversation between the remaining two is bizarre. Meletius confides in Innocentius that since the riot he has had the phrase, “Christ, in

⁵⁷ *clamore sanctissimo ... absolvi se a vinculis Iudaicae superstitionis deprecabatur* 15.2

⁵⁸ *exinde nostris adhaerens lateribus atque consiliis, obstinatissimam cunctorum duritiam nobiscum increpabat* 15.3

⁵⁹ *a fidelissimis probatissimisque viris* 18.3

your name” (*Christe, in nomine tuo* 18.6) in his mind and he had not been able to expel it. Innocentius replies that Meletius is a man of good heart but he believes that God has placed the phrase into his mind (*Ex Deo hoc esse arbitror* 18.7). However he begs him to expel the bothersome thought.⁶⁰ Meletius proceeds to struggle against it with visceral force, his body and head shaking, making guttural noises, swearing, or cackling with laughter in his effort. It is to no avail. “But this insanity could not extinguish the name of Christ from his mind because already the fire of healing had spread through all his bones.”⁶¹ The last sentence cannot have come from Meletius and Innocentius. Like the comment by Reuben above about the superstition of Judaism, this is clearly a commentary by the implied author through the narrator rather than something that either of the Jews would have reported.

When Meletius again complains that he cannot drive out Christ’s name from his mind, Innocentius replies that he has heard that Theodorus converted to Christianity already and wonders if Meletius will do the same. This prompts him to lament their ordeal in the cave and question why and for how much longer they can endure it with no provisions.⁶² His subsequent worries about dying of hunger or thirst in the loneliness of the countryside seem far-fetched considering the short amount of time they have been away. But the most interesting thing he says follows these complaints.

Numquid latronum vincula, numquid barbarorum gladios fugimus? Numquid sanguinem nostrum plebs tam misericors quam pro nobis flere conspeximus concupiscit? Recordemur, obsecro, quem umquam laeserit, cui nostrorum verbo saltem irrogarit iniuriam, et revertamur ad innoxios, quos in nullo sensimus inimicos, et quod Deo placuerit fiat.’ (18.14)

⁶⁰ *obsecro...interpellationem molestae cogitationis expelle.’* 18.7

⁶¹ *Sed haec ab animo eius nomen Christi extinguere nequivit insania, quia iam cunctas eius medullas sanitatis ignis pervaserat.* 18.10

⁶² *Quid ergo in hac terribili solitudine diutius tempus terimus? Quamdiu etiam inopia victus laborare poterimus?* 18.13

Do we flee the chains of thieves? Do we flee the swords of barbarians? Do so merciful a people whom we saw crying for us desire our blood? Let us recall, I beseech you, what harm they ever did, to which of us they brought injury in word even, and let us return to those innocent people, whom in nothing we have sensed them enemies, and let happen what God pleases.

If these are Innocentius' words, it is hard to comprehend why he fled in the first place. If we look back to the scene before the men fled, we see chaos in the streets and Jews and Christians confronting one another. Severus reported then the Lion was among the people which frightened them away. There is a definite contradiction in what occurred before and what Innocentius says in this passage. The only way to explain this is through the discourse of the implied author. The observation by a Jew that no harm has ever been offered to them by the Christians is a strong piece of evidence that no laws have been broken and it absolves the Christians of any threat of hostility. Although Meletius does not agree to return to the city right away, eventually they do return and convert, like Innocentius predicted. The escape into the woods was for naught. Even after considering escaping from the island, which it turns out they are unable to do, they come to recognize that it is safer to become Christians than to remain Jews.

The next pair of named characters is Galilaeus and Caecilianus. The first character, another relative of Theodorus', appears to have a fictitious name, like Theodora and Reuben. Severus again explains the name as divinely inspired.⁶³ In reality, Severus reveals something else. He is ignorant of Jewish naming customs.

One other kinsman of Theodorus is mentioned in the *Epistula Severi*, and he is troubling for the historian since he is one of two Jews mentioned in the letter whose names appear to be fabrications. Are we really to believe that Theodorus has a young cousin named Galilaeus? Jews almost never named their children after geographical regions, least of all the region that had for generations been a byword for 'Christian'.⁶⁴

⁶³ "by name Galilaeus, so that by the agreement of names, as has been said often already, the mystery of deeds might be led right up to the end." *nomine Galilaeus, ut congruis, sicut iam saepe dictum est, nominibus mysterium gestae rei usque ad finem deduceretur*.19.3

⁶⁴ Bradbury 1996: 37

His audience would have recognized the name, however, and seen the irony in it even if they did not know it was not a likely choice for a Jew.

Galilaeus immediately announces to the crowd of gathered Jews his intention to convert.

His statement is the closest to an acknowledgement of Christian hostility that we see in the letter.

cum ingenti invidia proclamare hoc coepit: 'Contestor,' inquit, 'vos omnes, me Iudaeum esse non posse. In possessione siquidem mea Christianos consortes habeo, quorum odiis, si in Iudaismo perseverare voluero, forsitan perimendus sum. Ego igitur vitae meae periculo consulens, ad ecclesiam iam nunc pergam, ut necem quae mihi praeparatur effugiam.' (19.3-5)

He began to proclaim this with great disdain, "I swear to you all that I am not able to be a Jew. Indeed I have on my estate Christian partners, by whose hate, perhaps I will be killed if I were to wish to continue in Judaism. Therefore looking after my life free from danger, I will now go to the church so that I might escape the death which is being prepared for me.

The vocabulary is plain and direct: hate, danger, die, and death (*odiis, periculo, perimendus, necem*) leave little room for interpretation. These are words expressing fear caused by threats. Galilaeus believes that the Christians are preparing to kill him if he remains a Jew and his only option, if he wants to live, is to renounce his faith and join them.

Before continuing the narrative, Severus inserts a comment about Galilaeus' speech:

"Galilaeus, although he thought he was making up these words for the present time, as it seemed he had related the causes of his conversion, not giving a thought then about the death of the future age, he was unknowingly speaking the truth."⁶⁵ The interruption here delays the story and is jarring to the reader. At the same time, the language of Galilaeus' speech was also uncharacteristic of the rest of the letter. While Severus in all other locations has carefully avoided any mention of hostility on the part of the Christians, Galilaeus has just given direct evidence to the contrary. Severus shows in his observation that there was a reason for this and, in

⁶⁵ *Haec Galilaeus cum ad tempus confingere se putaret, quasi ut causas conversionis suae reddidisse videretur, de futuri saeculi morte tunc nihil cogitans, veritatem inscius loquebatur.* 19.5

interpreting it for the audience, guides the reader away from blaming the Christians. Galilaeus, it turns out, was unaware of what he was saying. He thought he was talking about the present moment when in fact he was unknowingly describing the future. Once again, we have the voice of the implied author using the narrator to deliver his thoughts. The shock of the imagery used by Galilaeus should linger with the implied audience in thinking about what the future age holds for Jews who do not convert.

Caecilianus speaks in support of Galilaeus immediately after the interruption. He agrees with Galilaeus and reports that he has similar fears himself.⁶⁶ Galilaeus then rushes off to join the church but Caecilianus stays to address the gathered Jews. We learn that he is prominent both among the Jews and the rest of the community and currently holds public office.⁶⁷ He describes himself as second only to Theodorus in the synagogue.⁶⁸ He delivers a powerful speech encouraging the Jews to renounce their faith and become Christians.

adhortor atque commoneo, denuntians ut errore pravi itineris derelicto, si fieri potest, omnes pariter ad fidem ecclesiasticam concurramus. Quod si vos ad Christum tanta eius virtus non adtrahit, ego certe et Florianus, frater meus, sicut recusantibus vobis tantam salute vim inferre non possumus, ita nos cum universa domo nostra religionis huius, quam astruere non valemus, ludibria deserentes, Christianorum numero fideique sociabimur; qui numquam utique innumerabilibus scripturarum testimoniis non solum te, frater Theodore, qui peritior reliquis videris, sed etiam cunctos convincerent, nisi veritatem quae vinci non potest sectarentur .' (19.8-9)

I encourage and advise you, reporting as having abandoned the error of our evil journey, let us all equally run to the faithful church, if it is possible to happen. If such virtue as his does not lead you to Christ, certainly my brother Florianus and I, while we cannot bring great force against you refusing salvation, in this way with our entire family deserting the sham of this religion which we are not strong enough to support, we will ally ourselves with the faith and number of the Christians; They absolutely would never conquer with their innumerable testimonies of scripture not only you, brother Theodorus, who is seen as more skillful than the rest but even all the others, unless they were pursuing the truth which cannot be conquered.

⁶⁶ *Galilaeum dicere seque simile causam habere et similia formidare adtestabatur* 19.6

⁶⁷ *non solum inter Iudaeos verum etiam in civitate usque adeo praecipuus, ut etiam nunc defensor civitatis electus sit* 19.6

⁶⁸ *cum sim in honore synagogae post Theodorum primus* 19.8

Severus reports he learned that Caecilianus addressed his people with this sort of logic⁶⁹ and that the results were quite successful. In fact, many Jews rushed with him on that same day and converted.⁷⁰ As we have seen elsewhere, the words spoken by this character do not seem like the words a Jew would actually say. The insulting way he speaks of his own religion is suspicious. In fact, they seem the words of an anti-Jewish Christian rather than those of a revered leader of the Jewish community talking about his own people. It is also curious that he mentions that he and his brother are unable to use force against the Jews to make them convert if they do not choose to join the Christians. The frustration he expresses belongs to the implied author, not to Caecilianus. He places the words into the Jewish leader's mouth however for two reasons. First, to acknowledge that he is aware that violence cannot be used overtly. Second, he wants to suggest that any violent thoughts belong to the Jews and not the Christians. The dissimulation continues the discourse which has appeared in the words of the other characters as well.

Artemisia, wife of Meletus, is the final named character in the letter. Her situation is rather different than the men who have been discussed previously. Unlike them, she has no speaking role. Everything is related about her and the narrator does not try to represent her in thought or speech in the same manner as the other characters. She is introduced as one of three women who are reluctant to convert even though all the other Jews have already done so. Of the three, she is the only one named. The second is identified as the wife of Innocentius, and the third is her sister. All three women are of noble birth.⁷¹ Their stories are mostly associated with miracles and so will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. However it is noteworthy that the last three converts on the island are all women. Stereotypes about the misguided behavior of

⁶⁹ *Tali Caecilianum sensu plebem suam affatum comperimus* 19.10

⁷⁰ *multosque Iudaeorum eadem die ad fidem Christi cum ipso pariter concurrentes... suscepimus.* 19.10

⁷¹ *Tres ...feminas sed nobilissimas Iudaeorum* 24.1

Jewish women are seen throughout this part of the account. For example, Artemisia abandons her husband's home and retreats to a cave in the countryside. In behaving this way, the narrator describes her as having forgotten her feminine frailty (*oblita femineae infirmitatis* 24.3). Likewise we are told that she was unyielding in her anger to her husband⁷² and stays away from home for three days before a miracle brings her back. Innocentius' wife stayed home but refused to yield to her husband despite his threats, prayers, and tears.⁷³ He finally had to summon the crowd of Christians who helped him to sway her. And her sister was so set in rejecting Christianity that she boarded a ship and left the island. None of these women show proper obedience to their husbands while they remain Jews. It is only when they join the Christians that they are shown to yield to the men of importance.⁷⁴

All other characters in the letter are nameless. They are less people and more expressions of stereotypes that serve to express or reinforce identity. They are not individuals per se but representations of the implied author's view of the types of people he perceives. Like the named characters, they are important for the role they play in developing those identities (which I will discuss later). Therefore, they do not need to be developed as individuals because that is not their purpose.

The focus on purposes includes a recognition that narrative communication is a multi-layered event, one in which tellers seek to engage and influence their audiences' cognition, emotions, and values. Moreover, the approach recognizes that, in telling what happened, narrators give accounts of characters whose interactions with each other have an ethical dimension and that the acts of telling and receiving these accounts also have an ethical dimension. Consequently, the rhetorical approach attends to both an ethics of the told and an ethics of the telling.⁷⁵

⁷² *matrona a viro suo offensa inexorabilis* 24.5

⁷³ *nullisque Innocentii coniugis vel minis vel precibus vel lacrimis moveri posset* 27.3

⁷⁴ See Kraemer (2009) and Drake (2013) for further analysis of this phenomenon.

⁷⁵ Phelan 2007: 203

Chapter 3: Setting

The setting of the narrative, like the presentation of characters, is a crucial element to understanding the discourse of this letter. “Fundamentally, setting, like character, has three components, the synthetic, the mimetic, and the thematic, any or all of which can take on important functions in a given narrative – depending on the narrative’s progression and purpose.”¹ Furthermore, setting can be divided into three elements: spatial, temporal, and social.² The remote location of Minorca, creating a spiritual desert in which Severus sets about calling the faithful to him and offering salvation to those whom he views as enemies, is described with significant detail. Creating a binary opposition between the Christian sections of the island and the Jewish sections in the opening paragraphs, the implied author continues to make use of the geography and the passage of time throughout the letter to delineate the two groups. At times, the landscape takes on a mystical appearance in which flora and fauna react to the presence of the Jews according to divine will. Likewise, time is distorted in some instances so the author can speed up or slow down events which he wants highlighted or ignored. These unreal descriptions combine with the dream world of Severus’ (and other characters’) visions and prophecies to lead the authorial audience to the intended acceptance of the author’s message. By the end of the letter, Severus has altered the setting to his new vision. Freed from Jewish contamination and completely under control of the Christian bishop, Minorca is at last at peace.

The physical geography of the island is the first thing Severus describes after his introductory paragraph. This is not an unusual topic for ancient writers and he begins with the typical form: name, location, size. He remarks as well that the island is well known from ancient

¹ Herman et al. 2012: 85

² Powell 1991: 70

writers.³ At this point, the narrator comments, “I mention these things now for this reason that it might be able to be recognized that the ‘contemptable things of the world’ are chosen by the Lord not only in people but also in places.”⁴ His allusion to the Bible (1 Cor. 1:28)⁵ lends gravitas to his letter from the beginning. In addition, the implied author connects the narrator and the island together in this statement because Severus had just described himself as most unworthy of all in Christ (*indigens et omnium ultimus in Christo*) in the salutation of the letter and in the next few sentences calls himself the least of all mortals (*omnium mortalium ultimo* 2.6). This is an important initial connection to make because the flora and fauna of the island will show hostility to the Jewish inhabitants while the Christians live in harmony with nature.

He enhances his description immediately after this, saying the island is the last in the world in its small size, dryness, and harsh conditions.⁶ He then launches into a description of the two cities which, from the start, are shown to be opposites. The theme of binary opposition is reflected in the setting as we saw it was with the characters. The cities are on opposite sides of the island and face the ocean in different directions, like two people standing back to back.⁷ The real difference between the two cities though is in their inhabitants: there are no Jews in Jamona. This, according to Severus, is not coincidental. Rather it is a gift from God that the Jews are not able to live there.⁸ Fear of dying (his examples of divine intervention include illness, sudden death and even lightning strikes 3.2) keeps them from approaching the city. It is worth noting that from the beginning the author indirectly suggests that fear of death is a good way to keep

³ *nomen cunctis populis saecularium quoque auctorum litteris pervulgatum est*. 2.1 Bradbury notes (p. 126 n.1) that some of the observations he makes about the island are corroborated by ancient authors like Pliny and Strabo in their descriptions of Minorca

⁴ *Quae nunc idcirco commemoravi, ut agnosci possit 'contemptibilia mundi' a Domino non solum in hominibus sed etiam in locis eligi*. 2.4

⁵ Bradbury 1996: 81

⁶ *quae omnium terrarum parvitate, ariditate, asperitate postrema est* 2.5

⁷ *Iamona ad occasum, Magona ad orientem spectat* 2.5

⁸ *Sed Iamona antiquum a Deo munus etiam nunc retinet, ut Iudaei habitare in ea nequaquam possint*. 3.1

Jews away. They are not openly attacked in Jamona; the reputation of the place is enough to keep them from even trying to live there.⁹ Thus the agenda for the letter is made strongly but subtly from the start. Fear and intimidation with a reputation for strong action will guarantee Christian control.

Another remarkable thing about Jamona is its lack of dangerous animals and plethora of beneficial ones.

Nec hoc fide indignum ducimus, cum etiam vulpes luposque et omnia noxia animalia deesse videamus, cum earum quae ad vescendum bonae sunt ferarum magna copia sit. Illud etiam magis mirum est, quod colubri atque scorpiones sunt quidem plurimi, sed amiserunt omnem nocendi violentiam. (3.3-4)

Nor do we consider it unworthy of our faith that we seem to be lacking even in foxes and wolves and all harmful animals while there is an abundance of those wild beasts that are good for eating. What is even more wondrous is that the snakes and scorpions which are indeed very plentiful have lost all violence of harming.

It is already obvious that the Christian city of Jamona has many blessings, according to Severus.

The switch to animal imagery provides a transition to using familiar tropes against the Jews.

Jamona is lacking harmful animals like foxes and wolves (the Jews) and has only beneficial ones (the Christians). Severus is sure to point out that the Jews are like wolves and foxes in case the comparison was lost on his audience¹⁰ adding the detail that they are fierce and treacherous.

More important, however, is the snake and scorpion imagery that follows. These particular animals were once poisonous but have lost their ability to do harm in the presence of the Christians. Ideally, this is what Severus wants to happen with the Jews. He will show us in the rest of the letter how that can be accomplished.

Having firmly established the situation in Jamona, Severus now contrasts it with Magona. Unlike in Jamona, there are many Jews living there. In fact, there are so many that the city

⁹ *adeo ut celebris huius rei fama ipsis quoque Iudaeis, ne id ultra temptare audeant, metum fecerit.* 3.2

¹⁰ *Iudaeorum, qui lupis ac vulpibus feritate atque nequitia merito comparantur* 3.5

seethes with them. Severus includes the snake and scorpion imagery once again to make clear that the Jews in Magona were deadly.

Magona tantis Iudaeorum populis velut colubris scorpionibusque fervebat, ut quotidie ab his Christi ecclesia morderetur. Sed antiquum illud carnale beneficium, nuper nobis spiritualiter renovatum est, ut illa, sicut scriptum est, 'generatio viperarum' quae venenatis ictibus saeviebat, subito divina virtute compulsa mortiferum illud virus incredulitatis abiecerit. (3.6-7)

Magona was seething with such a population of Jews like with snakes and scorpions that daily the church of Christ was being devoured by them. But that ancient physical kindness was recently renewed to us spiritually so that as it has been written, that “generation of vipers” which was raging with poisonous bites suddenly by compulsion of divine virtue threw aside that deadly illness of unbelief.

The target of the Jews’ attacks is the church, according to Severus. Their presence gnaws away at the Christians daily. Reinforcing his statement with an allusion to Luke 12:49,¹¹ he then foreshadows the outcome of his work – the Jews will be rendered harmless by the will of God in the same way that the serpents threw aside their poisons attacks. Severus writes in the past tense because the events have already occurred. However, he is about to tell the story of how it happened. In the next section, he begins to tell his story from the time in which he became bishop. Therefore, the passage above is the close of the introductory frame to the story before the main narrative begins. The initial setting is complete. The reader has developed an image of opposing cities, one peaceful and one self-destructive, as well as an opinion of the Christians as blessed by God and in harmony with nature while the Jews are vicious and deadly like poisonous scorpions and snakes. However, the author has also directed the audience to anticipate that there will be a beneficial resolution in which the Christians triumph and the Jews cast aside that which makes them lethal.

While the Jews are reflected in the animal kingdom by wolves and foxes, scorpions and snakes, the Christians are likened to lambs (13.5). However, the context in which they are called

¹¹ Bradbury 1996: 83

agni is deceiving for it occurs in the moment before the riot breaks out which results in the destruction of the synagogue. The contrast is especially vivid because the lambs (i.e. Christians) decide they must attack the wolves (i.e. Jews) with their horns. This unlikely image creates a picture in the reader's mind of the innocent lambs that are defending themselves from the vicious wolves. However, the lambs have been inspired by "that terrible Lion" (*leo ille terribilis* 13.5). The Lion image repeatedly shows up in times of extreme zeal and religiously motivated violence in the letter (e.g. Theodorus' dream, compelling the Jews to meet Severus, the riot at the synagogue, the riot after the debate). When he first appears in Theodorus' dream, Severus explains that he is Christ (*Quis enim leo nisi ille 'de tribu Iuda, radix David'?*¹²). So while the traditional enemies are established by the conflict between lambs and wolves, the justification for violence is implied by the support of the Lion for the actions which the flock takes to protect itself. Interestingly, the only other reference to sheep in the letter appears near the end and in that instance, it is used to describe the Jews. By that point, they have all converted. The last Jewish woman who had tried to escape rather than convert returned with her daughters and joined the Christians. Severus explains, "Clearly I received the sheep who alone from all the number we thought to have wandered away, and I recalled her with her twin offspring to the flock of Christ."¹³ The wolves have at last been tamed and become sheep, increasing the flock of the Church. Indeed this is a better outcome than predicted at the start for the serpents have not merely lost their sting. Instead they are no longer a daily threat to the Church, and they have become followers.

¹² "For who is that Lion except he that is 'of the tribe of Judah, the root of David'?" 11.8 Bradbury points out that this is a quotation from the Book of Revelations (5.5) as a reference to Christ (Bradbury 1996: 91)

¹³ *Suscepi plane ovem quam ex omni numero solam errasse putabamus, eamque cum gemino foetu ad Christi ovilia revocavi.* 28.9

The setting of Magona is both physical and social. “Proximity and distance between landmarks or humans can be expressed in neutral topographical terms. But their narrative interest lies in their role in indicating how people experience their world.”¹⁴ There are not really many landmarks provided to give a sense of the space itself. There is reference to a church, the house in which Severus was staying, Theodorus’ house where he has lunch with Meletius and Innocentius, and the synagogue. Multiple meetings take place in public but there is no description of those places. Their relationship to one another physically is not clearly described. At one point Severus says that he was worshipping in the church where St. Stephen’s relics were established located a short distance from the town in a secluded spot.¹⁵ Is that the same church mentioned elsewhere? If so that makes the constant back and forth between the Jews and the Christians seem harder to believe. Like the characters, the mimetic elements of the physical city are strained and not easily understandable. This is the fault of underreporting by the narrator which leaves the reader with no clear picture. The same is true for the social setting.

After the initial description of the city, he does not say directly what life was like for the inhabitants of Magona. His description is convoluted and ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems rather volatile while at the same time, he hints at relative peace. This can be seen easily in the passage which follows the mention of St. Stephen’s relics arriving on the island. Their presence sparked a fire in the Christians, according to Severus, which created a passion to convert the Jews.

Denique statim intercisa sunt etiam salutationis officia, et non solum familiaritatis consuetudo divulsa est, sed etiam noxia inveteratae species caritatis ad odium temporale, sed pro aeternae salutis amore, translata est. In omnibus plateis adversus Iudaeos pugnae legis, in omnibus domibus fidei proelia gerebantur. (5.1-2)

¹⁴ Bridgeman in Herman 2007: 60

¹⁵ *ecclesia, quae paululum a civitate sequestri in loco sita est* 20.4

Then immediately even the obligation of greeting was cut off and not only the custom of friendliness was torn away but even the injurious appearance of long time affection was turned to hatred for a while but on behalf of eternal salvation. In all the public squares fights over the law were being waged and in every home battles over faith against the Jews.

The passage reveals hidden information and opinions. First, it tells us that there had been friendly activity between the two groups, namely the act of greeting, the custom of friendliness, even affection. Severus reports these things begrudgingly as can be seen by his need to denigrate them, calling them injurious and done out of a sense of obligation. Yet he cannot deny their existence whether he approves of them or not. This calls into question his earlier claim that the presence of the Jews in the city was so harmful as to inflict daily injury on the church. He never provides any concrete examples to support that claim. Such is the case with the social conditions he describes here as well. What were these fights that happened in every public square and private home? How did they transpire and what were their resolutions? He does not say. Yet he shows with his own words introducing Theodorus in the next passage how cooperative life really was in Magona. Theodorus could not have risen to such a prominent position if there was such friction between Jews and Christians. Not only did he hold positions of authority among the Jews but he had held civic positions in the town. He was held in high esteem by Jews and Christians alike.¹⁶ Based on the details of the text, we could read this to indicate that the harm to the church which Severus perceives is rooted in the harmonious conditions among the Jews and the Christians.¹⁷ Theodorus is thus a symbol of that ill because he, as an authority figure in the town, holds sway over the Christians. The notion of Jews and Christians living in mutual respect for

¹⁶ *non solum inter Iudaeos verum etiam inter Christianos eiusdem oppida* 6.1

¹⁷ Gaddis (2005: 6) has an interesting explanation of this phenomenon. "The motives of late antique religious zealots cannot be understood apart from a worldview shaped by martyrdom and persecution. This oppositional mentality, grounded in Christianity's early experience as a marginalized and often persecuted cult, derived legitimacy, authority, and authenticity from the actual or perceived suffering of its spiritual role models. Persecution, which loomed so large in Christian historical imagination, need not have always been literal. Even under the Christian empire, some claimed to suffer it simply because they were forced to tolerate the continued existence of pagans and heretics."

one another with Jewish leaders in charge is a rallying cry to Severus. He admits that the strife between the two groups coincided with his arrival on the island for, he says, it was on almost the same day on which he acquired his position as bishop that the relics of St. Stephen were brought there.¹⁸ As it turns out in the rest of the letter, his presence, far more than St. Stephen's relics, plays a continuous part in the conflict for domination.

Military imagery, introduced in the above passage, is highly prevalent in describing the social conditions from this point forward. He refers to the two groups as armies (*utrique exercitus* 6.4). After Theodorus quells the animosity for a time in Magona, Severus uses military imagery to describe the reaction in Jamona.

Maiore siquidem ilico exardescens violentia etiam vicinum oppidum fidei flamma corripuit. Et ut illa Salomonis sententia impleretur, 'Frater fratrem adiuvens exaltabitur sicut civitas firma et alta', statuerunt multi famuli Christi laborem itineris minime recusantes, cunctas animi vires huic bello tradere. (7.2-3)

In fact blazing up immediately with greater force, the flame of faith even took hold of the neighboring town. And so that opinion of Solomon might be fulfilled, "brother helping his brother will be raised up just like a city, strong and tall," many servants of Christ, rejecting the labor of the journey not at all, decided to hand over all their strength of spirit to this war.

It is clear that Severus is the instigator here. The seat of his authority is in Jamona. The initial conflicts he describes in Magona occurred while Theodorus was away on Majorca (7.1). They quickly ended when he returned. But they reappear not in Magona where the relics of St. Stephen were deposited but in Jamona where Severus holds sway. As he does elsewhere in the letter, Severus uses a biblical quotation to justify the actions of the Christians, in this case, showing that it was proper for the Christians of Jamona to march against the Jews in Magona. In addition, as he does elsewhere, he deflects the possibility of blaming him and the Christians for violence after

¹⁸ *Namque diebus paene isdem, quibus ego tanti sacerdotii nomen, licet indignus, adeptus sum* 4.1

he establishes that it was necessary to use force. Here, all the language for war and battle is modified by transferring the violence to the Jews and the victory to Christ.

Christum vero cuius 'regnum non in sermone sed in virtute est' nobis ne verbum quidem proferentibus, suis omnia viribus consummasse, et absque ullo sudore certaminis exercitui suo hanc quam nemo aut optare audebat aut sperare poterat victoriam concessisse. Iudaei igitur exemplis se Machabaei temporis cohortantes, mortem quoque pro defendendis legitimis suis desiderabant. Itaque non solum libros revolvere sed etiam sudes, saxa, iacula omniaque telorum genera ad synagogam conferre coepere, ut Christianorum aciem virtute Sancti Spiritus praemunitam, si ita res posceret, etiam corporis viribus propulsarent. (8.3-5)

In fact Christ whose 'kingdom is in virtue not in speech' achieved this with us offering not even a word, with his own strength and without any sweat of struggle for his army he completed this victory which no one was daring to hope for or able to expect. Therefore the Jews, encouraging themselves with examples from the time of the Maccabees, were desiring even death for the sake of defending their legitimacy. So not only did they begin to read their books but also to bring pikes, axes, javelins, and all sorts of weapons to the synagogue so they might drive off by bodily might the battle line of Christians which was fortified by the strength of the Holy Spirit.

This foreshadows the actual conflict which he relates later, first when he describes a bloodless battle on the way to the synagogue, and then when he conceals all the details of what transpired between the two parties which resulted in the destruction of the building.

The conflict scene between the two groups shows the way the author makes use of the temporal setting to promote his ideology. The scene begins after the dream sequence involving Theodora. Severus transitions back into his narrative (*Nunc autem, ut coeptae rei ordinem proseguar*¹⁹), explaining that the Christians in Jamona were impassioned by the plight of those in Magona and decided to set out immediately to assist them. They made the journey in record time.

Tantaque difficillimi itineris laborem alacritate confecit, ut triginta milia passuum iucundius transvolaret quam si ad suburbanum aliquod amoenissimum ad convivium epulari vocaretur. (12.2)

¹⁹ "But now, so I might continue to follow the order of my story..." 12.1

(The group of Christians) completed the task of the most difficult journey with such speed that they flew across the thirty miles more pleasantly than if they had been called to a dinner feast at some charming rural spot.

Upon arrival, Severus lost no time in summoning the Jews to meet him: “Therefore we arrived in Magona, and immediately I announced my arrival to the Jews by priests I had sent to them, and I demanded that they deign to approach the church.”²⁰ This initiates a series of correspondences between Severus and the Jews. He never says with which Jews he has this correspondence; these are not individuals for him but a collective, social whole. The sped up time of the scene keeps the reader too occupied with the results of the exchanges to consider such questions, however.

According to his account, there must have been four messages sent back and forth. Finally, the Jews were compelled somehow to meet with him at his residence in the city.²¹ The scene speeds along again, however, preventing the reader from wondering how they were compelled. Severus immediately accuses the Jews of plotting against the Christians and stockpiling weapons. When they try to object, he demands that they march to the synagogue to see the proof. They leave immediately, singing songs as they go, until some Jewish women throw stones and provoke a riot. The ensuing battle is miraculously without any bloodshed (only one person is struck by a rock). Yet somehow the synagogue gets destroyed during the fight.

Igitur posteaquam Iudaeis cedentibus synagoga potiti sumus... Omnia eius ornamenta, exceptis tamen libris atque argento, cum ipsa pariter ignis absumpsit. Libros enim sanctos ne apud Iudaeos iniuriam paterentur nos abstulimus; argentum vero ne vel de praedatione nostra vel de suo dispendio quererentur ipsis reddidimus. Eversa itaque cunctis Iudaeis stupentibus synagoga, ad ecclesiam cum hymnis perreximus et auctori victoriae nostrae gratias referentes, effusis fletibus poscebamus ut vera perfidiae antra Dominus expugnaret et tenebrosorum pectorum infidelitas coargueretur a lumine.(13.12-14.1)

²⁰ *Igitur Magonam pervenimus, statimque ego missis clericis adventum meum Iudaeis nuntiavi, et ut ad ecclesiam succedere dignarentur poposci.* 12.3

²¹ *tandem illius leonis terrore compulsi, ad domum in qua hospitio accesseram confluerunt.* “at last, forced by terror of that Lion, they poured forth to that home in which I had acquired residence.” 12.7

Therefore, after we acquired the synagogue from the Jews yielding it...fire consumed all the decorations with the synagogue except for the silver and books which had been taken out. For we took away the sacred books lest they suffer harm among the Jews; but we returned the silver so that they might not complain about our looting or their own loss. And so while all the Jews were stunned in the destroyed synagogue we made our way to the church with songs and giving thanks to the creator of our victory, and pouring out tears we were begging that the Lord assault the true caves of their treachery and the infidelity of their dark hearts might be brought into the open by the light.

Like the Jews, the reader is stunned at the destruction of the synagogue. There are no details provided to explain how a bloodless street fight ended with the synagogue burned to the ground. But again Severus distracts the reader from that by focusing on the books and the silver. He makes the ideological statement that they took the sacred books because the Jews would bring harm to them (presumably because of their lack of faith). He then follows that up with the mention of the silver. This allows him to make the Christians seem blameless again, moving the focus away from the guilt of the serious act of destruction to the pseudo-virtuous returning of the silver. This is not really a virtuous act per se. His intention is plainly stated: to prevent the Jews from being able to complain about the Christians stealing it. He is motivated not from a desire to avoid stealing but rather to be certain that the Jews have no legal authority to charge the Christians with wrongdoing. In the meantime, the Christians leave the Jews in the midst of the destruction and return to the church, bringing the audience with them away from the scene and its many unanswered questions. The fast paced action and intentional movement around the setting presents the reader with enough information to understand what happened without being able to reflect on the details of how it occurred. It is not mimetically feasible that all of these events transpired on the same day that the Christians arrived in Magona and yet that is how the story progresses. We know this for certain because the following passage describes events that happened one the next day (*postera ...die* 15.1), again moving the reader into new

circumstances with little time to evaluate what came before. In subsequent scenes, Severus manipulates the temporal setting for similar ideological purposes.

The miracle scenes in the letter are set outside the city. Curiously, far more detail is given in describing these locales than for the city itself. Severus makes use of the natural setting to further his cause. The incident with Meletius and Innocentius is a good example. When they escape from the riot in the city which occurred three days after the destruction of the synagogue, they took refuge in a cave. As we have just seen, Severus made it a point to say that the Christians were praying to God to assault the caves of Jewish treachery and bring them into open space of belief. That is what, in effect, this passage depicts. The two men flee to the cave to escape the Christians whom they fear. But while they hide there, they are haunted by temptation to convert. Initially, Meletius hears a voice saying, “Christ, in your name” (*Christe, in nomine tuo* 18.6) and he cannot drive the voice out. In fact, the more he tries, the more it sticks in his mind.²² Then there follows a long description about the ways in which he tries to drive the words out of his head through grunting, snorting, and even making obscene sounds. While he does this, Innocentius tries to convince him that he should give in and convert. He feels that they should not suffer so long away from civilization without food or supplies.

Quid ergo in hac terribili solitudine diutius tempus terimus? Quamdiu etiam inopia victus laborare poterimus? praesertim cum et illi duo iuvenes quos remisimus moram faciant, et famulis nostris locus hic in quem devenimus penitus ignotus sit. Quo autem fructu poenam nobis tam laboriosae mortis inferimus? Quid causae est ut fame tabescamus, arescamus siti, obrigescamus algore, et postremo, quod iam patimur, vastae huius solitudinis horribili terreamur silentio? (18.13)

Why then do we waste any more time in this horrible lonely place? How long will we be able to endure done in by lack of supplies? Especially since those two young men we sent back are delaying and this place in which we have arrived is completely unknown to our servants? But for what yield are we punishing ourselves with such a difficult death? What is the reason that we are wasting away from hunger, dehydrating from thirst, freezing

²² *Quantoque magis hoc propulsare ab animo meo nitor, tanto violentius tenaciusque inhaerescit* . 18.6

from the cold, and finally, being terrified by the horrible silence of this lonely place, which we are already enduring?

The passage in which this conversation takes place is far longer than the description of the synagogue riot. Innocentius describes their suffering in the cave as long lasting and harsh. In truth, according to this telling, they have only been in the cave for a single morning, perhaps a few hours. The details of Meletius' struggle and Innocentius' description of their suffering makes it seem like it is much longer. His fear of starvation and thirst seem silly when considered in these terms. In the end, they decide they cannot endure it anymore and make plans to escape from the island.

The setting outside the cave is portrayed as even harsher than inside. As they try to get away, the landscape itself seems to attack them.

Sed dum per angustissimum gradiuntur callem, cogitationum tenebris lucem excaecantibus oculorum, ipsum quem inscii sequebantur tramitem perdiderunt, et in locis sentis atque inviis decidentes, cum aut scinderentur vepribus aut rupibus arcerentur. Postquam corpus suum longis foedavere vulneribus, ad tantam primo quidem anxietatem deinde etiam desperationem atque formidinem venere, ut compellerentur fateri se hoc iusto Dei iudicio ob incredulitatem perpeti. Igitur nomen Christi, quod ante ultro se ingerens repellebant, laceratis iam cruribus invocantes, semitam quae eos contra voluntatem ac propositum suum ad oppidum retraxit corripuerunt. (18.21-23)

But as they march through the very narrow path, when the darkness of their thoughts blinded the light of their eyes, they lost the path which they were following unknowing and falling in trackless and thorny places when they were being torn by briars or closed in by cliffs. After they mangled their bodies with long wounds, first they came to such anxiety and then even to desperation and fear, that they were forced to admit that they endured this just judgement of God on account of their disbelief. Therefore with their legs now torn up, invoking the name of Christ, which conversely before they were repelling when it was forcing itself on them, they seized the path which led back to town against their will and plan.

The physical reality is affected by their belief. While they remain steadfast in their Jewishness, they are blinded and unable to find their way home (they were headed to Meletius' farm).

Severus states plainly that failure to embrace Christianity is the cause of their woes. As in the

opening description of the island, the physical geography reacts to the Jews harshly. They are scratched by thorns, deceived by the landscape, and blocked by cliffs as they try to proceed. Severus claims that this is God's will which the two men eventually come to recognize. Once they have accepted this and decide to identify themselves as Christians (i.e. convert) they are able to find their way back to the city without further harm. However Severus also comments that they return with injuries and that the decision to convert was against their will and plan.

Metaphorically, especially when juxtaposed with the previous scene of the bloodless riot, this incident represents Severus' plan for conversion. The scene also blends in elements of the introduction in which the topography of Minorca reacts to the beliefs of its inhabitants. It is not insignificant that this event follows those.

All reading is a combination of memory and anticipation. Our focus on whatever moment in the text we have reached will invariably be colored by our memory of what has gone before and our anticipation of what is to come. The order in which events are presented in the text is therefore crucial to our temporal experience of narrative.²³

The author has set up the scene to lead us to the anticipated conclusion. But he still makes us work to figure it out. One of the confusing aspects of this scene is how quickly and easily Innocentius is willing to abandon Judaism. From the start of their conversation in the cave, he repeatedly tries to convince Meletius to convert. He tells him he has heard that Theodorus has already converted,²⁴ he complains about their suffering in the wilderness, and he implores him to return to the Christians since they are not their enemies.²⁵ He even claims that it is the will of God that it should happen (*quod Deo placuerit fiat* 18.14). All of these things seem out of place and Meletius is not so easily convinced. It is only after he endures the hardship of the open countryside that he finally yields. This is the pattern which the audience will observe repeatedly

²³ Bridgeman in Herman 2008: 57

²⁴ *Theodorum, doctrina, honore, aetate maiorem ad fidem Christi conversum* 18.12

²⁵ *revertamur ad innoxios, quos in nullo sensimus inimicos* 18.14

in the letter: in the beginning there is general resistance. However, it is possible to convert members of the upper class by appealing to their desire for comfort and safety. The converted leaders will become the best allies in converting the others. For those who still refuse, force, perhaps including physical injury, can be used. However, it is important to keep focused on the will of God in the process. In the end, the Jews who did not willingly comply will do so albeit reluctantly. Drawing this incident out of the city and into the wilderness, Severus reminds his audience of the binary opposition in the introduction between the forces of nature and their reactions to the Jews and Christians. Meletius and Innocentius struggling to escape the treacherous landscape harkens back to the Jews who are killed for even trying to live in the Christian city of Jamona. When they renounce Judaism and turn back to Magona, having embraced Christianity, the reader thinks of the scorpions and serpents that were harming the city daily but then threw away their hurtful stings and venomous ways. Thus the harmony of nature which is given by God to the Christians is extended to the converts as well.

There are few other places in the letter in which the physical setting is described with much detail. There are some other instances of nature reflecting a connection to Christians however. For example, Severus reports that a group of Jews who happened to sail past the island (i.e. they were not inhabitants there) were driven ashore by the weather. According to the narrator, although they were allowed to leave, they chose to stay and convert of their own free will.²⁶ Likewise, rain was often a sign of nature and divine will in harmony. The narrator reports that it was generally sunny during the events he relates but that there were frequent rainstorms. The Christians came to joke that every time it rained, more Jews were converting. Often, after

²⁶ *Fuere quidam Iudaei qui, praetereuntes illuc appulsi, opportunitatem temporis atque ventorum aucupabantur; qui navigandi libertate concessa credere maluerunt.* 23

they just joked about it, there would be a knock at the church doors as Jews arrived to convert.²⁷

Whether or not this actually occurred, the author includes the anecdote to make the connection between divine will and nature. As elsewhere, he further supports the divine aspect with biblical support. Thus the story and the discourse are both reflected in the setting here as well.

Overall, the settings in the narrative are much like the characters. They are mimetically recognizable but not particularly realistic. The details are lacking in most instances to create a true picture of the physical world and often the details that are included are themselves not true to life. Synthetically, they are sufficient for the reader to accept them since it is a letter and not a novel or a real history. The underreporting of physical details and inconsistencies in the temporal elements are not so vast as to prevent the audience from understanding the story. Nor are they too subtle or too explicit to detract from the epistolary nature of the letter or from the discourse behind the story. In thematic terms, especially in the social aspects, the settings are successful in promoting the binary opposition between the Christians and the Jews. The implied author uses them well to suggest an agenda of quiet, forced coercion which removes blame from the Christians. At the same time, he calls for swift action to convert the Jews and views as unacceptable any role in society for them that is equal to or more elevated than the status of the Christians. At the end, this totalizing discourse of Jewish conversion has resulted in the spread of Christianity across the entire island. No longer divided into two opposed camps turned back to back, there is one imperial state under the bishop's authority.

²⁷ *Mirum dictu, frequenter, cum adhuc talia loqueremur, a quibusdam Iudaeis fidei ianua pulsabatur.* 25.3

Chapter 4: Dreams and Miracles

An important part of rhetorical narrative criticism is the role of the audience. As there are multiple authors so there are multiple audiences. In the case of the *Epistula Severi*, there are the flesh-and-blood audience (we, the current readers, for example, or someone hearing the letter read aloud at Uzalis in 425 CE¹), the narratee (those named figures to whom the letter is addressed), the authorial or implied audience (the ideal audience who would understand everything the author says), and the narrative audience (the observer role assumed by the reader who experiences the text; the role of the flesh-and-blood audience in the narrative).² Modern readers have a hard time accepting the validity of the dreams and miracles that Severus includes in his letter as a means to deliver his discourse and even to lend verisimilitude to his narration. A contemporaneous audience would not have had the same reservations and, in fact, would have expected such. In fact, historical writing and novels often contained miraculous elements that were accepted by their audience without question about their historicity.

The historical novels may, in fact, be more miraculous than the novels. Hebrew Esther and Judith, for example, do not contain any explicitly supernatural manifestations, but *Royal Family of Adiabene* and *Acts of the Apostles* do. Miracle is hardly a criterion of fiction for a pious people in the Greco-Roman period, despite the almost overwhelming need of modern readers to equate miracle with fiction. Miracle is, to be sure, an aspect of "bad" history in the minds of some of the best Greek and Latin authors, but it is considered history nonetheless.³

Rhetorical narrative criticism requires that the reader put aside anachronistic attitudes as part of the narrative audience and try to think like the authorial audience.

The goal of narrative criticism is to read the text as the implied reader. Kingsbury describes the implied reader as the "imaginary person in whom the intention of the text is to be thought of as always reaching its fulfillment."⁴ To read in this way, it is necessary to

¹ Bradbury 1996: 13

² Phelan in Herman 2007: 210

³ Wills 1995: 186

⁴ Kingsbury (1988: 38) in Powell 1990:20

know everything that the text assumes the reader knows and to "forget" everything that the text does not assume the reader knows.⁵

Dreams and miracles play a significant role in the narrative of the *Epistula Severi*. Prior research has dismissed these sections of the letter as typical examples of stories told by religious figures of the time that are meant to display the author's honor of God. While I believe that this is a valid point, I think it is important to delve deeper.

The character called Severus reports that many dreams and miracles occurred or were reported to him but he has chosen to include only a few. Why are these worth including? What can we glean from a close reading of the dreams and miracles he relates? In many instances, Severus provides us with his interpretation of the vision or event. He indicates how the dreams and miracles were signs of things to come using the events he relates (since they are all in the past at the time of his writing) as evidence of his correct interpretation. However it is necessary to look through the dreams and miracles to see how the figurative language of the unreal becomes a discourse of tropes (as Miller calls it)⁶ that contains a meaning that is hidden but implied.

Dreams

"One of the interesting features of Graeco-Roman dream interpretation is its view of the dream as a text in disguise."⁷ Severus takes full advantage of dreams in the letter to convey his discourse as a subtext. Even as a form of propaganda, if we can describe the dreams as such, there is significance in the language and imagery he uses.

With their vivid concatenation of images ... dreams lend tangibility and concreteness to the intangible. This... was one of the major functions of dreams in late antiquity: as one

⁵ Powell 1990: 20

⁶ Powell 1990: 6

⁷ Miller 1997: 74

of the modes of the production of meaning, dreams formed a distinctive pattern of imagination which brought visual presence and tangibility to such abstract concepts as time, cosmic history, the soul, and the identity of one's self. Dreams were tropes that allowed the world - including the world of human character and relationship - to be represented.⁸

Having set the stage for conflict and suggested a divine motive to justify it, Severus interrupts the flow of the story to relate a sequence of dreams. Recalling Raphael's warning, he says that he must mention the dreams for failure to do so would seem to obscure the glory of God.⁹ However, countless dreams appeared to both "armies" of people to warn them of what would happen¹⁰. Claiming that he wished to spare the narratee the boredom of too many dreams, he chooses to include just two.¹¹ He gives no explanation for why he chose the ones that he did. As they are part of his narrative, however, we must assume there was a reason for his choice and look to see what we can discover about the way in which they promote his discourse.

The first dream appeared to a Christian woman named Theodora who, he tells us, serves as a symbol for the church because of her piety.

Apud nos devota quaedam et religiosissima nomine Theodora, quae et virginitate corporis et religione propositi et nominis etiam interpretatione typum portare ecclesiae meretur. (10.1)

Among us there was a certain devout and very religious woman named Theodora, who on account of the purity of her body and the religiosity of her behavior and even by interpretation of her name, was deserving to bear the model of the church.

This statement leaves little room for doubt about its significance. Her dream is described thus:

Vidit in visione noctis viduam quamdam nobilissimam ad me, qui non pro merito sed pro divini muneris largitate sacerdotio fungor, insertas litteris preces misisse, quibus mihi cunctos agros suos ad seminandum suppliciter offerret. (10.2)

⁸ Miller 1997: 3

⁹ *Quorum si nullam penitus fecero mentionem, non minimam videbor partem divinae gloriae operuisse.* "If I make absolutely no mention of (the deeds), I will seem to have covered over no small part of the divine glory." 9.2

¹⁰ *utrique exercitus innumerabilibus atque absolutissimis somniis commonentur.* "Both armies were warned by innumerable and very complete dreams" 9.1

¹¹ *Igitur brevitatis causa, ne Beatitudini vestrae fastidium fortasse ingeratur, duo tantum somnia inseram.* "Therefore for the sake of brevity, I will include only two dreams lest perhaps it might bring boredom to your Blessedness." 9.4

In a night vision she saw a certain very noble widow had sent to me (who enjoys the priesthood not through merit but through the generosity of divine gift) prayers inserted in a letter in which she was offering humbly all of her fields to me for planting.

The dream is short and direct. Severus, however, adds a second version of the dream (not yet the second dream) that he himself experienced. He claims that it was sent to him so he could “prepare for the sowing”.¹² The support of the first dream by the second is noteworthy. He continues to explain:

Vidua enim quaedam altera nobilissima, quam synagogae speciem habuisse non dubium est, me ut agros suos incultos susciperem eosque, quoniam tempus sementis surgeret, diligenter excolerem deprecabatur. (10.4)

For another certain very noble widow, who it is not doubtful had the appearance of the synagogue, was begging me to take over her uncultivated fields and, since the time of sowing was approaching, to cultivate them diligently.

As Severus said, the dreams are similar. In both, a noble widow offers him her lands to till. There are a few striking differences however. If there were not, the narrator would not have had to include the second dream beyond mentioning it had happened. Therefore, the differences should stand out to the audience as important. To begin with, Severus tells us in the second dream that the widow is a symbol of the synagogue. Second, the fields in the second dream are uncultivated. Third, she asks Severus not simply to cultivate them but to do so diligently. Lastly, the reason for her request is that the time of sowing is approaching. By immediately repeating the dream but adding new details, the implied author has more forcefully communicated to his audience his message. And yet it seems at first that he was either unconvinced they would understand or extremely eager to get his point across because he interpreted part of the dream as soon as he told it. “But who is this other very noble lady unless it is she who widowed herself most cruelly by

¹² *Simili etiam somnio me...ut me ad seminandum praecingerem, Christus commonere dignatus est.* “Christ deigned to send to me a similar dream...so that I might prepare for the sowing.” 10.3

impiously killing Christ?”¹³ Oddly, the part that he interpreted was the same part he had already interpreted when recounting the dream (*quam synagogae speciem habuisse non dubium est*). He reveals nothing new about the dream with this comment; he merely adds an insult against the Jews. He then restates that the dreams are the same.¹⁴ However, it is clear that they are not the same. The repetition and obvious discrepancies while insisting the dreams are the same demand that the reader reconsider the differences again. Since we have established that the widow is the synagogue, we are challenged to divine the meaning of the uncultivated fields, the diligent sowing, and the approaching time of sowing. Given the context of the letter, the uncultivated fields are likely the Jews which the synagogue is handing over to Severus to convert (i.e. cultivate). He is asked to do so vigorously because the time is ripe for such action. Why it is the right time remains unclear. It could be because of the arrival of the saint’s relics, the appointment of Severus as bishop, or the political situation in Rome¹⁵ to name just a few possibilities. (The last possibility is supported in the closing paragraph of the letter where it says, “Perhaps that time predicted by the Apostle now has come so that with the entirety of the people having entered, all of Israel will become saved”.¹⁶) Regardless, the dream tells him it is the correct time to convert the Jews and Severus wants his audience to believe that. Importantly, the dream shows the widow asking him to take over the fields. This is a key component of his discourse. As with St. Stephen’s relics, he carefully disguises his agency in the conversion behind another façade. In doing so, he shows his audience how to dissimulate the actions and make them appear to be

¹³ *Quae est autem altera nobilissima vidua nisi illa quae Christum impie perimendo semetipsam crudelissime viduavit?* 10.5

¹⁴ *Hoc somnium utriusque unum est* “This dream and the other are the same.” 10.6

¹⁵ Bradbury (1996: 51) presents a detailed explanation and background to millenarianism issues at the time. Citing military calamities (e.g. the recent sacking of Rome), disease, and natural disasters as relevant factors in literature of the time he says, “To conclude, expectation of the End were a conspicuous feature of the religious atmosphere of the period and it is plausible that Severus and his flock would be susceptible to them.”

¹⁶ *Forsitan enim iam illud praedictum ab Apostolo venit tempus, ut plenitudine gentium ingressa omnis Israel salvus fiat* 31.3

voluntary or peaceful. The author models for us here that he wants his audience to look between the lines to get his real meaning and not accept it at face value. Hence he has put his message into the medium of a dream that an implied audience would understand to be a vehicle for hidden meaning.

The second dream in the sequence is Theodorus'. Severus is therefore repeating a dream that was told to him. He knows what happened because Theodorus supposedly told the dream to several townspeople including a venerable matriarch as well as many Christians¹⁷.

'Eunti mihi', inquit, 'secundum consuetudinem ad synagogam duodecim viri manus obvias obtulerunt, dicentes, "Quo vadis? leo illic est." Cum ego audito leonis nomine trepidare coepissem, locum tamen dum fugam paro unde introspicerem repperi, et vidi monachos illic mira suavitate psallentes. Maior ilico mihi terror adiectus est, et nisi in cuiusdam Iudaei nomine Ruben ingressus fuisset domum, et inde ad matrem propinquam cursu praepeti convolassem, nequaquam vim mortiferi terroris evasissem. Illa, inquam, me exanimem sinu suo confovens et a discrimine pariter et metu eripuit.' (11.3-6)

He said, 'Going to the synagogue according to my custom, a band of twelve men blocked my way saying, "Where are you going? There is a lion there." Although I had begun to fear from hearing the name of the lion, while I was preparing my flight I looked for a place from which I might look inside, and I saw there monks singing with a wondrous sweetness. From there a greater terror increased in me and unless I had entered into the home of a certain Jew named Reuben, and then I had fled in direct flight to a female relative, I never would have escaped the force of that deadly terror. She, I say, cradling me frightened in her lap, snatched me from fear and crisis.'

As with the previous pair, Severus immediately explains the dream, stating that it is perfectly clear and in no need of interpretation.¹⁸ His explanation though is hardly without its own questions. In fact, he explains the dream by asking two questions, "Who is the Lion unless it is he 'of the tribe of Judah, the root of David'?" and "Who is the relative unless she is the one about whom it has been written, 'one is my relative'?"¹⁹ These explanations require the reader to

¹⁷ 11.2

¹⁸ *Hoc eius somnium valde clarum est et interpretatione non indiget.* "This dream of his is very clear and not needing interpretation." 11.7

¹⁹ *Quis enim leo nisi ille 'de tribu Iuda, radix David'?... Quae propinqua nisi illa de qua scriptum est, 'una est propinqua mea'?* 11.8

connect them to the sources to which the author alludes (i.e. Revelation 5:5 and the Song of Songs 6:8²⁰) to realize he means, respectively, Christ and the Church. The simple message is that he will be scared of the Christians but eventually run to the Church for protection and solace. Even then, the significance of them as prophetic statements is not as obvious to the reader at this point as it seems to be to the narrator. As in the previous dream sequence, the reader must reflect on a deeper meaning that lies below the surface. Severus has provided the surface meaning but cues the reader that more is meant than said. Rather than using a repetition of the dream like in the first sequence, he uses an additional comment about Reuben. He admits to the reader that he has not explained yet that section of the dream in which Theodorus, frightened by the Lion, entered Reuben's house.²¹ He states, however, that it became perfectly clear to him later and that he will explain it to his audience in the proper place.²² In other words, Severus communicates directly to the audience that he is intentionally withholding information after he already said that there was no need for explanation.

Returning to the dream, there are still some unanswered questions. Theodorus says he was stopped on his way to the synagogue by twelve men. He does not identify them and they are not explained. Given the context, the number twelve could recall the apostles as a symbol of Christ. They prevented him from entering the synagogue and told him that there was a Lion inside. Severus tells us that the Lion symbolizes Christ. While the connection to Christ is evident, as he says, there still remains a mystery with this symbol, namely that it appears elsewhere in the letter. In other places, the Lion is an active participant in events, directly causing fear. For example, the Lion appears when Severus resumes his narration about the

²⁰ Bradbury 1996: 91 and 127, note 10

²¹ *Illud ergo solum videbatur obscurum, quod in domum Ruben Iudaei cum a leone terreretur ingressus est.*

“Therefore this alone was seeming hidden, why he entered into the house of the Jew, Reuben, when he was terrified by the lion.” 11.9

²² *Quod quidem nobis postmodum ab ipso leone, qui terruit ut salvaret, evidentissime expositum est. Quod dehinc suo explicabimus loco.* 11.9

conflict with the Jews. When he demanded that the Jews meet with him and they repeatedly refused, Severus says that they were finally “compelled by that terrible Lion”²³ to come to his house. Then, when the Jewish women began to throw rocks at the crowd proceeding to the synagogue, “that terrible Lion stole the tameness from his lambs for a while”.²⁴ Finally, it appears in the plaza on the day that Theodorus addresses the crowds and is clearly winning the debate against the Christians. When panic swept through the crowd driving them into flight, Severus says that, “That terrible Lion was pursuing them who, as Theodorus had revealed, had sent forth from the synagogue through the monks a roar with which he terrified our resisting enemies”.²⁵ While the Lion may be a symbol in the dream, it must represent some other agent in the real world which Severus describes. Christ was not present physically to persuade the Jews to meet with Severus. Likewise, it is more probable that the Christians themselves were angered and decided to fight back against the Jews on the way to the synagogue. And perhaps most clearly, Christ did not pursue the Jews through the streets of the city. It must have been actual Christians. Theodorus too was surely frightened not by a real Lion or the presence of Christ in the synagogue. Some other physical and real world danger confronted him which was frightening enough to make him convert. But no one is actually implicated in the act of coercion or bringing physical violence against the Jews with the way Severus relates his story. His dream sequences tell his audience both what his story is about and that he will use symbols to conceal the facts in his telling.

²³ *tandem illius leonis terrore compulsi* 12.7

²⁴ *agnis suis leo ille terribilis mansuetudinem paululum abstulit* 13.5

²⁵ *Persequebatur enim eos ille leo terribilis qui de synagogae loco, sicut Theodoro fuerat revelatum, per monachos rugitum emiserat, quo resistentes tremefecit inimicos* 16.10

Miracles

In addition to the dreams, Severus reports a number of miracles that happen during the events on the island. Some are mentioned simply in passing while others, like the episodes about Meletius and Innocentius (which I discussed in Chapter 3) or those involving the Lion, are more elaborate. Their function in the letter is similar to the dream sequences in some regards but quite distinct in others. Specifically, miracles serve to reinforce the discourse of forced conversion (particularly justifying the use of violence), to establish and confirm the authority of the bishop by displaying divine support for his actions, and to re-write Jewish history in a Christian context which asserts the new imperial Christian identity. These are not uncommon uses of miracles in Christian literature. After providing a list of miracles associated with violence in the fourth and fifth century, Gaddis notes,

Miracles, then, reinforced the holy man's display of authority, and lent legitimacy to his action, divine violence backing up human... The preceding examples help to formulate a paradigm of holy violence for the late antique holy man, by which dramatic actions against enemies of the faith served as an expression of religious authority...²⁶

Likewise, Severus provides a series of miracles which involve dramatic action performed in zeal for Christ and thus are justified because they are done in accordance with God's will.

Severus wants his audience to view the conversion of the Jews as both a good and necessary thing. One of the ways he seeks to accomplish this is by claiming divine support and assistance for what happened. He signals this to the reader from the beginning, even before he tells his audience what has happened. Immediately following the salutation, he writes:

Cum 'opera Dei revelare et confiteri honorificum esse' Raphael archangelus moneat, profecto silere vel celare miracula Christi periculosum est... ego quoque magnalia, quae apud nos Christus operatus est, Beatitudini vestrae ... referre aggrediar. (1.1-2)

²⁶ Gaddis 2005, 186

Since the Archangel Raphael warns us, “it is honorable to reveal and acknowledge the works of God,” it is really dangerous to remain silent or conceal the miracles of Christ...I also will attempt to report those great deeds which Christ has accomplished among us.

While he mentions *miracula* in the first paragraph, he gives no indication of what they might be. The reader may at this point feel that it is a standard comment from a bishop and may not necessarily indicate supernatural events. In the second section, however, still before any mention of Jews converting, the narrator describes the island. After some initial and mundane information about the geography, he states, “But even now Jamona retains an ancient gift from God, that the Jews are not at all able to live in it.”²⁷ He then lists a number of miraculous things that have happened: Jews who have tried to live in Jamona have been driven out by sickness or death, some have been struck by lightning; ferocious animals have lost their poison and been rendered harmless. While these are more specific and impressive, they are still rather common tropes that Christians use against Jews and so not surprising or unexpected. In a general sense, they help establish the binary opposition between Christians and Jews that the implied author wishes to promote as his world view. However, they do not seem to have a deeper meaning on their own yet. Rather, they set the stage for further development of this theme which follows.

In the next section, Severus reveals that some relics of St. Stephen the Protomartyr were brought to Minorca at about the same time that he assumed the title of bishop in Jamona. Severus further asserts that the martyr himself was responsible for their arrival: “He placed in the church of the mentioned town (i.e. Magona) relics of the blessed martyr, Stephen...without a doubt by the inspiration of the martyr himself.”²⁸ The result was immediate. “When this was done, immediately that fire of his love, which the Lord came to send to the earth and that He desired to

²⁷ *Sed Iamona antiquum a Deo munus etiam nunc retinet, ut Iudaei habitare in ea nequaquam possint.* 3.1

²⁸ *beati martyris Stephani reliquias...ipso sine dubio martyre inspirante, in memorati oppidi ecclesia collocavit.* 4.2

burn fiercely, set ablaze.”²⁹ The fire of Stephen’s zeal inflamed the Christians with a passion to save the Jews.³⁰ At once the social relations between the two groups deteriorated. Surprisingly however it did not last. Theodorus returned from his stay on Majorca and quieted the social tensions. It is impressive that one man, a Jew, had such influence over the population of the town. But this peace was short-lived too. The ardor was rekindled soon after but, interestingly, not in Magona where the relics were kept but in Jamona where Severus was. This has been a topic of consternation among scholars because they cannot explain why St. Stephen has such a minor role in the letter after his initial introduction.³¹ Yet to expect more from St. Stephen is to misunderstand his role in the narrative. He and his relics are not meant to be more than symbolic and a distraction. As if by sleight of hand, Severus has suggested to the reader that the saint was the cause of the anger against the Jews when in fact Severus himself was responsible. In that sense, St. Stephen’s relics are a tool in the discourse and thus, as an element in the first active miracle in the letter, serve as the model for the others.

One of the most striking segments about miracles is provided in the first riot scene which ended with the destruction of the synagogue.

Sed antequam ad synagogam perveniremus, quaedam Iudaeae mulieres (ordinatione, credo, Domini) audaciam praesumentes, ut scilicet nostrorum lenitas incitaretur, lapides in nos ex superiori loco immanissimos iactare coeperunt. Qui, mirum dictu, cum super confertissimam multitudinem grandinis instar deciderent, neminem nostrum non solum ictu sed nec tactu quidem vexavere. (13.3-4)

But before we reached the synagogue, certain Jewish women (by order of the Lord, I believe) becoming bold began to throw huge rocks³² on us from higher places, obviously so our gentleness might be challenged. Wondrous to say, although they fell onto a dense crowd like hail, they harmed none of us by blow or even by touch.

²⁹ *Quo facto, protinus ille, quem Dominus 'venit mittere in terram' et quem valde ardere cupit, caritatis eius ignis accensus est. 4.3*

³⁰ Stephen is most frequently associated with anti-Jewish miracles since he himself was martyred at Jewish hands.

³¹ Bradbury 1996: 126 note 4. St. Stephen is only mentioned twice more in the letter.

³² The parallel here to the stoning of Stephen by the Jews would be obvious to the audience.

The fact that no one was injured is clearly amazing. However, the focus on that strange result distracts from the even stranger notion that these women happened to have rocks to throw from high places and that they were capable of throwing such large (*immanissimos*) stones. It is surely hyperbolic to claim that they had so many large rocks that they could make it rain “like hail” on the crowd. And, for that matter, how did Severus know that it was only women who threw the rocks? All in all, it seems a contrived story as told.³³ That does not mean it is without significance though. Like in the dreams, Severus has concealed or disguised a few important ideas. For one, he states that he believes the women acted in accordance with God’s plan. Throwing the rocks is *de facto* the action which leads to the riot and eventually the destruction of the synagogue. Thus, he is saying that the destruction of the synagogue was God’s plan, effectively sanctioning the violence which occurred. Also, the women threw the rocks to provoke the Christians from their gentleness. This must mean, by his evidence of God’s plan, that to remain peaceful was actually contrary to divine will. This is certainly a strong call and justification to use violence against the Jews.

The reaction of the Christians was, in fact, immediate and violent. Returning to the imagery of the Lion, and invoking his earlier animal imagery to reinforce the binary opposition of the Jews and the Christians, Severus says:

Hic agnis suis leo ille terribilis mansuetudinem paululum abstulit. Omnes siquidem frustra reclamantibus nobis saxa corripunt, et pastoris commonitione posthabita, cum unum consilium cunctis zelus potius Christi quam ira suggereret, lupos comibus impetendos censuerunt, quamvis hoc illius qui solus verus et bonus pastor est nutu factum esse nulli dubium sit. (13.5-6)

³³ This scene is not without some precedent, however. There are other stories of women hurling rocks down upon powerful enemies, for example, the old woman who killed Pyrrhus of Epirus with a roof tile as told in Plutarch (Plutarch, Pyrrh. 34.2 as noted in Barry 1996: 55). Barry notes “Like the pitchfork or the shepherd’s crook for the peasant, the roof tile was for the urban dweller an important weapon in an otherwise limited civilian arsenal.” In other stories, however, the men are killed or injured. (cf. Judith, Sisera and Jael)

Here that terrible Lion snatched away the gentleness from his lambs for a short while. Everyone grabbed rocks while we were shouting in vain and, when the warning of their shepherd had been neglected, when one plan was uniting everyone more for zeal for Christ than out of anger, they decided the wolves must be attacked by the brotherhood, although no one doubted that this was done with the approval of that one true and good shepherd.

The references to wolves and sheep allow the addition of the shepherd image. This in turn serves two goals. Severus exculpates himself from any implication of wrongdoing because he describes himself as protesting against the riot. The Christians ignored his protests and attacked anyway. Yet he also seeks to lessen any blame against them since their motive was passion for Christ rather than anger.³⁴ Finally, he concludes that regardless of the earthly policies, the divine will was being enacted properly, with the blessing of the “one true and good shepherd.” While he does not directly state that he disagrees with the current laws or practices, he shows that he believes they are not in keeping with divine justice which overrides all else.

One other minor miracle occurred during the synagogue riot. While none of the Jews was presumably injured and most of the Christians escaped unscathed, one slave was struck with a rock. His owner was a Christian and the slave had accompanied him with desire to steal objects from the synagogue³⁵ rather than out of desire to convert the Jews or from his commitment to Christ.³⁶ He was simply greedy. The stone which struck him was thrown by a Christian who was aiming for a Jew³⁷ but hit the slave instead. Severus credits the wound with two results: forcing the slave to confess his greed³⁸ and causing the others to fear similar retribution if they should

³⁴ As Gaddis (2005: 191) states, “Holy violence, as an expression of the spiritual authority of the Christian holy man, involved...the willingness to carry out violent destruction, and even to kill, if such was the will of God. Zeal for God justified the deed, and as such overrode normal considerations of secular law and order – a claim bluntly asserted in the words of Shenoute: ‘There is no crime for those who have Christ.’”

³⁵ *aliquid a synagoga diripere concupiscit* 13.10

³⁶ *non Christi illuc sed praedae amore adtractus advenerat* 13.9

³⁷ *Quidam enim nostrorum quasi adversus Iudaeum saxum iniecit* 13.10

³⁸ *vulnus ... ilium rapinae suae confiteri concupiscentiam compulit* 13.11

likewise act out of greed.³⁹ It is worth noting that the injured man was a slave and not a citizen. This makes his injury far less of an issue legally. In addition, he was wounded by a Christian and not a Jew. This one injury still did not cross the line that divided the two parties. But there is an element of coercion and terror in the story and the support of divine will is again present. The slave was forced to confess his greed by being struck with the stone. The scene also reminds the reader of the “ancient gift from God”⁴⁰ which keeps the Jews out of Jamona through the same power of fear. Here too, the story itself is enough to frighten others not to engage in the activity. The discourse of the author begins to emerge more forcefully in the repetition of these patterns in various anecdotes.

On the next day, a certain Jew named Reuben converted to Christianity. Severus claims that this conversion was a direct result of the prayers of the Christians on the previous day. After the synagogue was destroyed and the Christians had taken hold of the Holy Scriptures, they returned to the church, pouring out tears and praying that God should wipe out the false beliefs from the Jews’ hearts and bring them into the light.⁴¹ It was not coincidental that Reuben converted first; he was chosen by God.⁴² The reason for the choice is made clear: the name has to be appropriate for the first convert. As we have seen elsewhere, names are important in the letter. Thus the first Jew to be re-born as a Christian has the same name as the first born son of Jacob⁴³ (*Statimque 'primogenitus Iacob' factus* 15.3). Scriptural parallelism lends authority to occurrence and marks it as divinely sanctioned.

Three days after the conversion of Reuben, the next miracle takes place. No further conversions happened during the interim. At that time, Theodorus came to the location of the

³⁹ *cunctos ne similiter laberentur praesenti terruit ultione* 13.11

⁴⁰ *antiquum a Deo munus* 3.1

⁴¹ *effusis fletibus poscebamus ut vera perfidiae antra Dominus expugnaret et tenebrosorum pectorum infidelitas coargueretur a lumine* 14.1

⁴² *Ruben quidam Iudaeus a Domino ut primogenitus omnium constitueretur electus est* 15.1

⁴³ Bradbury 1996: 95 and 127, note 10

synagogue's ruins with some followers. He was met there by Severus and his band of Christians. A debate ensued between the leaders. While he does not say so directly, it is clear that Theodorus was winning. The Christians, dismayed at the imminent defeat of their leader in a verbal duel, prayed for divine assistance.⁴⁴ What follows is a truly strange description. The miracle which God grants the Christians is that the Jews misunderstand their shouts. Where they shouted, "Theodorus, believe in Christ!" (*Theodore, credas in Christum!* 16.4), the Jews heard, "Theodorus has believed in Christ!" (*Theodorus in Christum credidit!* 16.7). It indeed seems miraculous that the two phrases would be confused by the Jewish listeners especially in the context of Theodorus easily defeating Severus in the debate. To a person reading or listening to the phases next to each other, they are clearly not the same. But Severus cleverly prevents them from being too close to one another in the text which makes the comparison less immediately striking to an audience. Instead, after he reports what the Christians actually shouted, he launches into a description of other miracles that God has performed. In particular, he recalls the miracle of the four lepers in Samaria⁴⁵ and then of Gideon and the Midianites⁴⁶. In the first tale, the lepers entered into the Samaritans' camp and found it deserted. The Samaritans had abandoned it after God made them believe they heard the sound of approaching chariots. In the second story, Gideon is able to use a smaller and weaker force against the larger army of the Midianites to frighten them away because God put fear into their hearts. Once he has prepared his audience with these two allusions, he reveals what the Jews were caused to hear. The audience at that point is expecting there to be a misheard event and so less surprised when it happens. Severus

⁴⁴ *Christianus videns quia verbis superari non posset humanis, auxilium de caelo imploravit.* "The Christian (crowd) seeing that he was not able to be overcome with human words, begged for help from heaven." 16.3

⁴⁵ 2 Kgs. 7

⁴⁶ Judg. 7: 19-22

has thus again used biblical authority and the order of his presentation to direct his audience toward what he wants them to think.

The issue of fear in this passage is greatly confused. Severus explicitly tells us that the Jews are fearful while at the same time claiming there was no reason for them to be scared.⁴⁷ But the misunderstanding definitely resulted in panic among the Jews. Women ran about like mourners at a funeral, tearing out their hair and howling.⁴⁸ The men fled in terror searching for places to hide in the city or the wilderness.⁴⁹ The description of the crowd's reaction recalls the Gideon allusion and makes it seem that Severus and his tiny band of Christians (who had been losing up to that moment) put the entire force of Jews to flight in panic. We are then told that Theodorus stood in a stupor observing how divine will was being fulfilled in his own people.⁵⁰ Severus includes a reference to Proverbs⁵¹ (*'Fugit impius nemine persequente'* 16.10), restating his assertion that the Jews were fleeing for no reason. He then contradicts himself and declares that in fact they were being pursued by "that terrible Lion" who put fear into the resisting enemies.⁵² As before, the Lion causes panic without any explanation of how he does so. There can be no doubt from the reaction of the Jews that there was violence and coercion. Severus' description, however, gives no evidence and leaves everyone blameless of such behavior while at the same time his allusion to the Lion again asserts divine authority supporting the Christians.

The reappearance of the Lion in the scene recalls Theodorus' dream. As Severus reports, he was standing on the remains of the synagogue when he made his speech before the Lion arrived. When his companions subsequently abandoned him, Theodorus looked for his own

⁴⁷ *cuncti pariter trepidi; ubi timor non erat, terrebantur.* 16.7

⁴⁸ *Mulieres eorum sparsis crinibus concurrentes cum ferali ululatu* 16.8

⁴⁹ *Viri autem alii ad devios saltus et fissuras montium confugere, alii per ipsius oppidi angustias discurrebant, locum in quo delitescerent invenire cupientes.* 16.9

⁵⁰ *Theodorus stupore percussus divinam sententiam in plebe sua cernebat impleri* 16.10

⁵¹ Bradbury 1996: 99

⁵² *Sed tamen non 'nemine'! Persequebatur enim eos ille leo terribilis... resistentes treme fecit inimicos* 16.10

escape. Instead, he encountered Reuben. The recent convert approached him and encourage him to convert as well. According to Severus, Reuben, “heaping on as an example his own belief as a protection from fear, somehow seemed to open up the house of his faith to which he was fleeing from the fear of the Lion”.⁵³ This is a clear albeit metaphorical statement that the Jews can find escape from danger by becoming Christian. After being promised he can retain his position in society if he converts, Theodorus agrees to convert. He is granted a brief period of time to get his things in order before making his conversion public however. Severus reports that the mystery of Reuben’s role in the dream has now been explained: Theodorus had entered into Reuben’s house by making his promise.⁵⁴ The final portion of the dream would be fulfilled within three days. At that point, when he fully joined the church, he would be received by his female relative and cradled in her lap, relieved of all discomfort of fear.⁵⁵ From this perspective, the conversion of the Jews looks comforting and maternal. The images of the dream superimposed over the realities of the struggle are far more inviting and pleasant.

Two other miracles occur together toward the end of the letter. Severus specifies these as “prodigies that happened in the sky”.⁵⁶ His recounting of these two miracles seems convoluted and in some cases contradictory. He begins with the latter of the two, and then tells the former before he offers his opinion on what they mean. As is obvious from reading his letter closely at this point, he does this intentionally to support his discourse. His purpose does not become apparent until he reaches the end of his description.

⁵³ *ingerens ei pro suffragio metus suae credulitatis exemplum, domum fidei suae ad quam a leonis pavore confugeret quodammodo patefacere videbatur.* 16.12

⁵⁴ *in domum Ruben per promissionem suam iam videretur ingressus* 16.19

⁵⁵ *propinquam...quae eum post triduum materno suscepit sinu et ab omni perturbatione trepidationis absolvit* 16.19

⁵⁶ *Prodigia sane quae de caelo tunc facta sunt* 20.1

The first miracle he relates occurred around the seventh hour⁵⁷ when they began to celebrate mass. The day had passed quickly⁵⁸ while they were encouraging the Jews to convert or recording their names as they joined the Church.⁵⁹ He points out that the church was located outside the city and that it is the same church in which St. Stephen's relics had been placed.⁶⁰ The miracle took place outside the church where two monks were reclining in the grass and a man named Julius and his unnamed companion were walking on their way to the church. One of the monks suddenly spotted a ball of very bright light⁶¹ about the size of a man.⁶² The vision was so clear and bright that it appeared like the sun setting over the church.⁶³ The other monk who was with him saw a similar image but not quite the same. According to him, it was the same vision but seemed to be farther away.⁶⁴ Severus does not mention what Julius and his companion saw but he does say that certain Jewish woman (they had not converted yet), including Meletius' wife, saw the same vision from their upper window. It appeared to them that the light was sinking over the church also.⁶⁵ Since Severus does not provide many details about the geography of the town, it is hard to know how realistic it is that the women in the city could see the church which is located in a remote place outside of Magona.⁶⁶ Severus does not dwell on this issue but rather changes the topic by commenting that no one really knows what the vision was. However he suggests it may have been an angel or St. Stephen.⁶⁷ On a certain level, the appearance of St. Stephen would make sense here since his relics are buried in the church. Interestingly, however,

⁵⁷ *Hora circiter septima* 20.2

⁵⁸ *pars diei maior effluxit* 20.3

⁵⁹ *dum nos advenientes ad fidem Christi Iudaeos vel exhortamur vel adnotamus* 20.3

⁶⁰ *et in qua sancti martyris Stephani nuper conditae reliquiae conquiescunt* 20.4

⁶¹ *globus quidam candidissimi luminis* 20.6

⁶² *staturam quasi hominis adaequans* 20.6

⁶³ *Tantae vero claritatis atque fulgoris fuit quod...sol decidere videretur... quasi trans basilicam* 20.7-8

⁶⁴ *Ille enim ita quidem etiam sibi visum, tamen longius fuisse, non quasi certus sed ut aestimans, astruebat.* 20.10

⁶⁵ *Mulieres autem quaedam tunc Iudaeae, inter quas matrona Meletii...de cenaculo prospicientes, ita sibi id ipsum visum esse confirmabant, quasi supra basilicam decidisset.* 20.11

⁶⁶ *quae paululum a civitate sequestri in loco sita est* 20.4

⁶⁷ *Verum hoc, utrum angelus an ipse sanctus Stephanus an vere id quod visum est fuerit, incertum etiam nunc est.* 20.12

there are conversions occurring in the church at the time as this vision. St. Stephen does not get mentioned often in the letter but whenever he does, Severus is performing an act that he wishes to deflect toward someone else or support with divine will. The suggested appearance of the saint descending on the church makes the conversions a blessed event.

Without any transition, Severus then relates the second miracle which occurred about three hours before the vision of the ball of light.⁶⁸ At that time a very fine hail⁶⁹ fell. The strange thing about it was its scent and flavor: it smelled and tasted sweeter than honey.⁷⁰ It is a simple miracle compared to the previous one. But Severus makes a great leap in his explanation.

Multi itaque sapientes cum eadem die filios Israel ab Aegypto perfidiae suae atque a servitute egressos viderent, haec quae facta sunt signis illis, quae in Exodo legimus, comparabant; huic populo, qui Deum credulo corde intuens verum iam Israelis nomen meruit, manna crederent renovatum. Columnam quoque ignis, quae patres in eremo praecedebat, ut etiam et filiis a vera Aegypto atque a fornace, sicut scriptum est, ferrea egressis ducatum praeberet ad vitam, ostensam fuisse aestimabant. Et re vera, sicut lectio Exodi adtestatur, similitudo signorum minime discrepabat. Nam et illud, quod nivem fuisse credimus, semen coriandri minuti adaequabat, mel sapore referebat. (20.15-17)

And when many knowing saw the sons of Israel leave the slavery and Egypt of their treachery on the same day, they were comparing these things that happened and those signs which we read in Exodus; they believed that manna had given new life to this people who, considering God with a believing heart, deserved the true name of Israel. And they were judging that the column of fire which preceded the fathers in the desert had been shown in order to provide life to those sons having left from the true Egypt and the iron furnace, as it was written. And indeed as the reading of Exodus confirms, the similarity of the signs was disagreeing very little. For also that which we believed to be hail, was close to the seed of the tiny coriander and was recalling honey in its flavor.

There is nothing in these two miraculous events that links to Egypt per se. Severus reveals a new element of his discourse in connecting these things. In effect, he makes the attempt to convert not only the Jews who live on the island but their ancestry or history as well. He suggests that the

⁶⁸ *Eadem sane die hora circiter quarta, id est, paulo antequam hoc signum demonstraretur* 20.13

⁶⁹ *grando minutissima* 20.13

⁷⁰ *Haec, cum odor ex ea mellis fragrare coepisset, a multis quos per viam verberaverat degustata dulcior melle comperta est.* 20.14

exit from Judaism and into Christianity is the modern equivalent of their escape from slavery in Egypt. The symbols he describes in the vision parallel those of Exodus, rewriting the original text to fit his new context. This implies that conversion is not only divinely approved but also in the best interest of the Jews and their well-being. In fact, they do not become fully themselves and deserving of the name of Israel until they convert according to Severus' new concept of their history.

Severus has one final observation about this pair of miracles. The vision of light and the honey sweet hail appeared not only to those he mentioned previously but also to those people whom God considered worthy⁷¹ in Jamona, the other city where he was stationed. Although it defies logic that anyone on the other side of the island would have seen the light above the church, Severus is able to draw a conclusion about the meaning.

Unde intelligi datur Iudaeos per universum orbem fidei lumine visitandos, quoniam quidem nobis qui in hac insula atque in hoc parvulo, ut ita dixerim, orbe consistimus, tantus caelestis gratiae splendor illuxit, ut usque ad extremos terrae nostrae terminos signorum visio perveniret. (20.20-21)

From which it is given to be understood that Jews through the entire world must be visited by the light of faith, since on this island and, as I will have spoken in such a way, in this little world we live, such splendor of heavenly grace has shone, so that the appearance of the signs might arrive all the way to the extreme ends of our earth.

In this final comment, Severus reveals his real purpose in writing the letter. He is not simply reporting and justifying the events that happened on Minorca; he is calling for universal action to compel Jews to convert everywhere in the world. His reasoning is that the appearance of these miracles on such a small, isolated place shows that all other places up to the most remote should be similarly diligent in their efforts to bring about the same result.

One final miracle remains in the letter. Like the miracles involving Meletius and Innocentius and the last two I mentioned, this one also occurs outside of the town. Artemisia, the

⁷¹ *quos dignos Dominus iudicavit* 20.19

wife of Meletius, refused to convert even after her husband and all of the Jewish men on the island had already done so. Instead, she retreated from the city accompanied by a friend, a nurse, and a few slave girls and went to hide in a cave. It happened to be located near a vineyard⁷² but still in a remote locale. On the third day of their stay there, she discovered that the water they had been using in the wine vat had turned into the sweetest honey.⁷³ Once everyone had tasted it to be sure it was true, they proceeded to search around and noticed that even the dew had become honey-flavored.⁷⁴ This sign was enough to make her rush back to the city, tell everyone what happened, and immediately convert to Christianity with no further reluctance.⁷⁵ Severus, true to his fashion, connects this miracle to another and supports it with a biblical reference.

Verum eadem die, qua Meletii uxor amaritudinem incredulitatis abicere ex melle compulsa est, eadem, inquam, die qua memorata filia Israel, quasi in deserto posita, illum antiquum lacum Mara iniecto crucis ligno obdulcuisse persensit, ita mirifico vereque caelesti omnis ecclesia odore fragavit, ut praesentiam Spiritus Sancti, quam et ante iam aliquotiens sed paucissimi senseramus, fraternitas paene universa sentiret.
(24.11)

Truly on that same day on which Meletius' wife was compelled by the honey to cast aside the bitterness of her disbelief, on that same day, I tell you, on which the memorable daughter of Israel, as if she had been placed in a desert, perceived that ancient lake Mara to have turned sweet after the wood of the cross had been thrown into it, in such a way the whole church grew fragrant with a marvelous and truly heavenly aroma so that nearly the entire brotherhood sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit which only a very few of us had sensed sometime before.

Several important things are found herein. First, it is noteworthy that Severus declares that Artemisia was compelled (*compulsa est*) to abandon her Jewishness. He had not reported it that way when he told the story of the miracle but in his evaluation the underlying truth is revealed.

⁷² *speluncam licet in vinea tamen in remotiore paululum loco sitam* 24.2

⁷³ *repperit aquam de qua per biduum usa fuerat in mellis suavissimi versam dulcedinem.* 24.6

⁷⁴ *rorem, qui in herbis plurimus erat, degustatum similem reppererunt.* 24.9

⁷⁵ *statimque ad fidem Christi sine reluctance consensit.* 24.10

Second, he again draws a connection to Exodus with his comparison to the sea of Marah.⁷⁶ This reinforces his earlier attempt to reclaim Jewish history and scripture and place it within the sphere of Christian ownership. In this same context, he refers to Artemisia as a “daughter of Israel” which recalls his assertion that once the Jews convert, they become fulfilled and thus true children of Israel.

The dreams and miracles in the *Epistula Severi* are multifaceted. Confusing to the modern reader and expected by the ancient audience, they are vehicles to promote the discourse of the narrative. They engage the reader on the story level of the narrative but also challenge the audience to find deeper meaning. The narrator, Severus, is employed by the implied author to guide the reader in how to interpret them. He accomplishes this by partially interpreting them himself while also signaling that more lies hidden for the reader to discover. This is similar to the way Shadi Bartsch describes the use of dreams and pictorial description in Second Sophistic Greek Romance:

Oneirography, like pictorial description, provides both readers and characters with a visual image that “requests a ‘translation’ as to its meaning, its function in the world (*sic*)⁷⁷ [and] calls upon and interrogates the reader whom it transforms into an interpreter” (Hamon 1981, 11);...Consequently, “since the dream and vision cry out for interpretation, deciphering will necessarily take place” (Beaujour 1981, 36).⁷⁸

The dream or miracle is a microcosm of the entire text which does the same thing. The complete narrative challenges the reader to make ethical judgements about the text and arrive at conclusions about the ethics displayed by the author. “Individual narratives explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audience to particular

⁷⁶ Bradbury 1996: 119 The allusion is to the sea of Marah which God turned sweet because the Israelites complained they were bitter. The inclusion of the wooden cross reminds the reader that this is a Christian reading of the Old Testament.

⁷⁷ The Hamon article actually says, “work”.

⁷⁸ Bartsch 1989: 80

ethical judgments.”⁷⁹ In this sense, interpreting and understand the dreams and miracle in the letter is essential to understanding the narrative as a whole.

⁷⁹ Phelan 2007: 10

Chapter 5: *Epistula Severi* as Fictional Narrative

The rhetorical approach conceives of narrative as a purposive communicative act. In this view, narrative is not just a representation of events but is also itself an event – one in which someone is doing something with a representation of events.¹

Are we doing justice to the *Epistula* by reading it solely as a document of confrontation over sanctuary and souls— over a synagogue and its community of worshipers? How unusual was the Minorcan coerced conversion in a landscape like that of the later Roman empire in the fifth century, where law and local deeds often displayed disjunction, and where bishops, rather than imperial administrators, applied the letter of the law to their community?²

The *Epistula Severi* is a fictional narrative in the style of a letter. While it may make reference to actual events that occurred, we cannot say they happened in the way the author reports them. Even if the recounting describes actual events, however, the story which the author relates in the manner in which he does so constitutes a narrative fiction which can be examined for its rhetorical content. There is much to be gained from such a study.

As we have seen, the rhetorical analysis of characters, settings, plot, and the dreams and miracles in the letter all reveal the discourse behind the story. In turn, since the rhetorical approach assumes a dynamic between the narrative and the audience, we can gain insight into the author's perception of his audience. This includes his understanding of what their reactions may be to his story and how he can influence them to accept his discourse as valid. We can also gain an understanding of his view of both Christians and Jews by the way in which he portrays them and the assumptions he makes about them.

The implied author, through the character of Severus, created a fictional world of binary oppositions. His world is so starkly divided between Christian and Jew that there was no room for other typical residents of the Roman world of late antiquity. Despite Minorca having a

¹ Phelan in Herman 2007: 203

² Sivan 2013: 129

shipping harbor on a major trade route between Africa and Spain, there is no evidence in the letter of anyone who is neither Christian nor Jewish. Pagans, barbarians, Greeks, etc. do not seem to occupy the world of the letter. In fact, although there is reference to Minorca being under Roman law³, there is no evidence of Roman officials, military or government personnel, at all. Even the ship which was driven ashore by the storm seemed to be carrying only Jews (who promptly converted).⁴ To what degree is this world believable? How important is the plausibility of this image to the reception of the letter? Can the lack of reality tell us anything about the author's true intention? All of these are questions that still need to be explored.

Audiences react to a text based on the judgments they make about it. These judgments fall into three categories: interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic.⁵ Interpretive judgments are influenced by the mimetic quality of the narrative. These are judgements based on the characters, settings, and events and the degree to which the audience relates to them. As I have mentioned, the mimetic elements of the text are rather weak. The characters are not particularly developed as individuals. Their reactions are superficial, lacking introspection. There is almost no growth or development of them as people which makes them difficult to care about much. Likewise, the setting is too unclear and ambiguous to be believable. The magical nature of the flora and fauna, the lack of details about the geography of the town and countryside, and the unreal distances that are covered in short spans of time all detract from the veracity of the setting. Even the events of the story are implausible. Allowing for the possibility that the authorial audience would be more open to miracles and divine intervention than a modern reader, the story lacks realism. This is mostly because the narrator does not provide sufficient detail to create a mimetically sound representation of events. This in turn forces the reader to question why the implied author would

³ In section 12.8 of the letter, Severus described Magona as *civitate Romanis legibus subdita*.

⁴ Section 23.

⁵ Phelan 2007: 9

create a narrator who is either so lacking in the skill to be more accurate or who chooses not to be. Based on the reading of the text I have employed up to this point, I suggest it was intentional. Severus frequently communicates things to his audience by not telling them. Instead, he, as seen in his narrator, underreports what he is telling so that the audience must fill in the gaps to understand his message. This has been his *modus operandi* through the text. The technique applies equally well to the letter as a whole. The details are lacking because they are not meant to be the center of attention to the audience. In fact, Severus wants the reader to focus on the message (i.e. discourse) and not the details. The thematic elements of the story are far better developed because they are more important than the mimetic ones. Pagans and Roman officials never appear because they are not part of the discourse he is creating. Likewise, Severus does not want his audience to dwell on the geography of the town because it is more important that they think about the threat Jews present to Christians. In fact, hiding the details about the truth of forced conversion is an aspect of the message he seeks to convey; thus he models this method to his readers. The lack of realism is an inevitable consequence of his discourse which creates a new reality that differs from the previous one. This may cause the audience to have a negative reaction to the text if the other elements (i.e. the thematic and synthetic) are not positive enough to overshadow any negative interpretive judgements they make.

Ethical judgements are reactions to the thematic presentation of the narrative. Therefore, they are influenced by the readers' view of the "moral value of characters and actions."⁶ Of course, the morals in the narrative are constructs of the author as much as the characters themselves and the setting. He creates and chooses how to present them in an effort to influence his audience to accept and believe them. The rhetorical approach notes that: "...individual narratives explicitly or implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their

⁶ Phelan 2007: 9

audiences to particular ethical judgements. Consequently, within rhetorical ethics, narrative judgements proceed from the inside out rather than the outside in.”⁷ As the reader moves into the role of authorial audience, it is necessary to accept the ethical world as it is presented. This means that the reader will have to agree or disagree with the moral value of the characters and the actions they are led to perform because of their morals. The degree to which the audience accepts the moral values of the text will affect the ethical judgements they will make in reaction to the narrative.

In short, just as there is a progression of events there is a progression of audience response to those events, a progression rooted in the twin activities of observing and judging. Thus, from the rhetorical perspective, narrativity involves the interaction of two kinds of change: that experienced by the characters and that experienced by the audience in its developing responses to the characters’ changes.⁸

At the same time, the implied author writes for an implied narrative audience that will undoubtedly understand and accept his ethical worldview. Therefore, examining the way the implied author addresses his narrative audience gives a good indication of the ethical world view he espouses. In the case of the *Epistula Severi*, this requires that we revisit the narrator and look at the way the implied author uses him as a mouthpiece to convey his own beliefs. In previous chapters, I have looked at the way Severus the narrator reveals elements of the discourse in his speeches (e.g. the binary oppositions of the text, the unreliable narration which creates gaps for the audience to fill, etc.). Some of the strongest examples of the implied author’s ethical point of view come from his portrayal of Christians and Jews in general. His description of both groups represents an attempt to clearly define what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be a Jew in a way that was not clear to the inhabitants of the island before his arrival. His narrative seeks to establish an identity for the Christians which is separate from the Jews and, in fact,

⁷ Phelan 2007: 10

⁸ Phelan 2004: 162

makes no allowance for the continued existence of the Jews. If we look at the letter from this perspective, the mimetic flaws it has are vastly overshadowed by the thematic purpose it invokes.

Severus assigns characteristics to the Christians and the Jews that are intentionally opposite. The Jews are compared with wolves and foxes because of their fierceness and villainy (3.5) while the Christians are mild lambs (13.5). The Jews look to earthly leaders like Theodorus (6.1) while the Christians put their faith in the divine, such as Saint Stephen (6.4) and Christ. The Jews consult scripture when preparing for the conflict and yet they stockpile weapons (8.4-5); the Christians rely on scripture and are protected by the Holy Spirit (8.4-5). The church is compared to a matron who is virginal and devout (10.1) whereas the synagogue widowed herself by killing her husband, Christ (10.5). These comparisons are not a new creation of Severus' but repeat the common themes against Jews found in other Christian writers attacking Jews. But they establish the ethical world view of the text which may contradict what was the reality of the situation. For example, there is evidence that the Jews and Christians lived at least somewhat harmoniously prior to Severus' arrival on the island. There were Jews in positions of authority (e.g. Theodorus and Caecilianus). The two communities were used to greeting one another amicably (as shown by the ending of that practice after the arrival of the saint's relics). They knew and were able to sing the same songs (as they did when proceeding from Severus' house to the synagogue). Severus does not cite these examples to show congenial feelings among Jews and Christians; they are symptoms of the wrong that existed in parts of the island. Sharing the same culture and treating each other as equals was dangerous to the bishop. By such behavior, according to Severus, the Jews were causing harm to the church daily (3.7). That is the ethical reality he wants his audience to understand.

Acceptance of the ethical point of view of the letter means acceptance of the identity of Jews and Christians as they are described. Thus the creation of a particular and separate identity for both the Jews and Christians is part of the discourse as well. As stated above, there is almost no development of the identity of individual characters in the letter. However, there is a pattern of growth which develops among the Jews as they convert, moving from a state of fear, ignorance, and weakness to a healthier life in the church. This is most clearly portrayed in the dream sequences when Theodorus flees from a position of fear to the protecting embrace of the matron (who is a symbol of the church). The same pattern applies to all of the other Jews, named and unnamed, in the rest of the text. The state of fear, chaos, and sickness in which they exist before conversion is dispelled by the peace, health, and serenity which follow their decision to join the church. Thus there is no real development of individual characters but a sweeping statement about what it means to be a Jew versus a Christian in Severus' fictional world.

Bradbury recognizes the lack of development in connection to the presentation of Christian characters: "The *Epistula* is frustratingly uninformative about individual Christians".⁹ But, because he takes the story at face value, he mistakenly thinks the letter is truthful in its presentation of Jews. "By way of contrast with the paucity of evidence about Christians, the *Epistula Severi* offers a wealth of information about the Jews of Magona."¹⁰ The problem with this statement is that the wealth of information is all provided by the character narrator, Severus. Jewish identity in the letter is a construct of the implied author's fiction. As such, it only provides us with the image of Jews that he wants his audience to have and it is not a very realistic view.

Identities, both individual and collective, are not a set of essential characteristics, but are the ascribed or recognised characteristics which a person or group is agreed to possess.

⁹ Bradbury 1996: 30

¹⁰ Bradbury 1996: 30

Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as an 'imagined community' can be applied to all group identities in that members of even the smallest identity group 'will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community'¹¹

In other words, Jews are ascribed characteristics which Severus believes the Christians might agree that they possess, not which the Jews themselves would claim.

Severus reveals his views about Jewish identity in three ways: direct description by the narrator, actions performed by characters, and the words of the Jews themselves. The direct descriptions by the narrator are overtly biased and rather hostile. The comparison to vicious animals is an obvious example. There are, in addition, numerous statements that he makes that are less direct but still significant in revealing his animus. For example, after the skirmish on the way to the synagogue, Severus says that none of the Jews pretended to have been struck, not even to arouse animosity, **as is their custom**.¹² Likewise when discussing Innocentius' wife and her refusal to convert with her husband, Severus describes her as being crushed by the **incurable sickness of disbelief** and refusing to take their medicine.¹³ The implication is that Judaism is an illness and Christianity is its cure. This is a bold statement to make about Judaism reflecting the implied author's concept of what Judaism is rather than showing any insight into Judaism itself. Severus shows a similar lack of understanding about Judaism in his description of the initial communication he has with the Jews upon arriving in Magona. When he summons them to have a discussion, he does not treat them as equals. His behavior is that of a ruler who assumes he should and will be obeyed. He is dismissive of their customs and acts like he understands them better than the Jews. His implication that they are acting out of deception rather than religious observance is particularly insulting. None of this reveals to us any real aspect of Jewish life on

¹¹ Anderson 1991: 6 in Miles 2002: 5

¹² *nemo Iudaeorum se contactum saltem fuisse, ne pro invidia quidem, ut mos est, simulavit* 13.7

¹³ *Haec cum omnem respuens medicinam insanabili incredulitatis valetudine opprimeretur* 27.2

Minorca in the fifth century. Rather, it shows the implied author's characterization of Jews which he wants to convey to his audience.

The actions of the Jews are similarly presented to create a particular identity. There is really no evidence in the text of the Jews behaving hostilely toward the Christians. The allegation of weapons stockpiling is never confirmed. Rather, it is avoided all together by the destruction of the synagogue. The instigation of the fight by Jewish women throwing rocks is attributed to divine intervention and the result that no one was injured, explained as a miracle, suggests that it never really occurred. Otherwise, the Jews are mostly shown as chaotic and easily frightened. They cling to their past (exhorting themselves to resist the Christians by retelling stories of the Maccabees (8.4)) but seem to quickly abandon their principles when pressured. They are easily frightened and flee when confronted or convert with little coercion. Even when they resist, they do not do so for long (e.g. Meletius, Innocentius, Theodorus, etc.). Earthly position and concerns are important to them as seen in the offer that Reuben makes to Theodorus. Bradbury finds it significant that there are Jews in position of authority and that the Jews and Christians seem to live in peace at the start of the story. While this may be true, it is not unique to Minorcan Jews. More important is that Severus tells us these things in conjunction with his description of the injury he claims the Jews cause to the church routinely. Therefore he is revealing them as part of his discourse against the Jews rather than about their social conditions. Boyarin is correcting in suggesting that the alleged harm caused by the Jews is in fact the blurring of the division between Christian and Jew. He provides as an example the joint singing of hymns on the way to the synagogue. Unlike Bradbury who views this as evidence of the closeness of the two cultures, Boyarin makes note of the irony that Severus shows the Jews joining the Christians in singing a song about their own destruction.

The ambivalence of this moment, with its representation of harmony but implication of coercion, exemplifies the ambivalence that has produced much, if not all, Christian violence against Jews, with Christians using the very texts of the Jews to predict precisely the discordant crashing of Jewish memory. Thus, rather than reading this as a moment of concord and harmony, I would propose to read it as a singular moment of violence in the text. The shared hymn singing, on this reading, is symptomatic of the pervasive ambivalence that drives the narrative. It is the fact that Jews and Christians share the same scripture and, in part, the same liturgy that produces the anxiety about borders that our text is so avid to dispel by reinforcing those very borders.¹⁴

Severus sees any form of harmony between Christians and Jews as harmful. His world view subordinates the Jews to the Christians and calls for them to be healed of their sickness by conversion. He seeks to present in their identity a division that enables him to say Jews are wrong and Christians are right. The suggestion that Jews and Christians live harmoniously and that Christians depend on and follow Jewish leaders implies that the Christians themselves are unable to distinguish any difference. The possibility that Christians and Jews share the same identity is a real danger in Severus' mind.

These "venomous stings" are plausibly read as a reference to the attraction that the synagogue had for the Christians of Minorca, whether actually to abandon the Church, or, more likely, to participate in the preaching and rituals of the Jews and their holidays much like Chrysostom's Antiochene congregation.¹⁵

The images of harmony, therefore, are not really insight into the social condition of the Jews on Minorca but rather a warning sign of the danger they present. To read them as such makes more sense in light of the rest of the discourse we have witnessed.

The words of the Jews themselves in the letter are the most curious markers of identity. One such verbal exchange involves Reuben and Theodorus (16). Reuben offers Theodorus safety and status if he too converts and Theodorus accepts without much hesitation. Theodorus only asks to delay so he may increase his glory by bringing other converts with him. This is a very unlikely response from the leader of the Jews, even if he feared for his own safety. It is highly

¹⁴ Boyarin 2004: 40

¹⁵ Boyarin 2004: 41

unlikely that a Jewish audience reading this would accept it as factual. The implication that a Jewish leader would cast aside his customs so freely in exchange for personal comfort and gain would be insulting. A Christian audience, on the other hand, might be far more receptive to such a portrayal of Jewish behavior.

Another important conversation which defines Jewish identity in this text occurs between Meletius and Innocentius in the cave. This exchange is much longer and even less realistic. Innocentius explains to Meletus that he, like his kinsman Theodorus, is destined to convert (18.13), explains that the words stuck in his mind, "*Chrste, nomine tuo*," were placed there by God (18.6-7), and that the Christians should not be reproached for anything they have done to the Jews (18.14). His claim that the same Christians that just chased them from the city are harmless (*innoxios*) and in no way their enemies (*quos in nullo sensimus inimicos*) simply makes no sense under the circumstances. But then again, it does not have to make sense or even be true. In Severus' world view, it is correct. It reinforces the notion that the Jews are not loyal to their customs and they recognize the superiority of Christianity. Furthermore, it goes a long way toward defining the identity of the Christians in the letter. A major part of Severus' discourse is that the Jews willingly leave their faith to become Christians and that no coercion was employed. He has repeatedly claimed that the Christians were peaceful and gentle at all possible times. He wants to implant this concept of Christian identity in the mind of the audience. What better spokesperson than the Jews themselves? As the creator of the narrative, he has the power to determine the reality he creates and he uses that to his full advantage here. He has effectively silenced the Jews by speaking for them and made them into a mouthpiece for his own view on Jewish and Christian identity.

I have also remarked that Kaplan's notion of nation as narration introduces the question of those marginalized by the narrative process of creating any given imagined

community. It is important to understand that marginalization is created not only by non-narration, by not letting the subaltern speak, but also by speaking for him or her...but the important question is to what extent they could recognize themselves in this narrative.¹⁶

The imagined communities in this text are the Christians and Jews as separate and opposite groups. Although, as Bradbury notes, Severus spends more of his description on the Jews than on the Christians, he does so in cases like this as a way of using the Jews to reflect who he wants the Christians to be. A Jewish audience would not recognize itself in the portrayal of Jews he presents. A Christian audience, however, would potentially accept the portrayal of the Jews and certainly be eager to accept the image of themselves as seen through these Jews' eyes. Levinson calls this "ventriloquism" and describes it as a process in which, "the imagining voice speaks through another, so that it appears that he or she speaks, but the narrator is only using the other as a tactic of self-fashioning."¹⁷ The technique is again employed in the words of Caecilianus when he addresses the crowd of Jews later in the text and persuades many to convert with him. After reminding everyone that he is second only to Theodorus in his authority in the synagogue,¹⁸ he encourages the others to convert with him. He refers to Judaism as a mockery of a religion¹⁹ and an evil, misguided journey.²⁰ On the other hand he mentions the power of Christ, describes the ranks of faithful Christians, and makes the claim that the Christians are able to defeat Theodorus and the Jews because they are pursuing the truth (19.9), implying that the Jews are not. Like the previous example, this is not an accurate reflection of a Jewish perspective but rather a redefinition of the contrast between Christian and Jewish identities. Severus repeats this technique to firmly establish the dichotomy he wants to maintain between the two groups. It also succeeds in silencing the Jews regarding their own identity and replacing it with one that

¹⁶ Levinson 2000: 365

¹⁷ Levinson 2000: 365

¹⁸ *cum sim in honore synagogae post Theodorum primus* 19.8

¹⁹ *religionis huius...ludibria* 19.9

²⁰ *errore pravi itineris* 19. 8

compliments a new, emerging Christian identity. This new Christian identity includes the discourse which, as discussed in the last chapter, reclaims the Jewish past and rewrites it as its own. As Boyarin says,

Rather than reading the text in the context of events of forced conversion for which it is, in fact, the only evidence, I would read it not so much (or not only) as referring to the conversion of Jews of Minorca, but rather as itself a sherd in an early-fifth-century assemblage of relics that point to a conversion of Judaism itself in the discourse of the hegemonic Christians in the first quarter of the fifth century. That is, whatever the truth value of the report of the events themselves, its writing and dissemination, together with its associated relics and other hagiographical narratives, suggest to me a moment of epistemic shift, the invention of a new form of “truth,” “religion,” here manifested by the production of a certain narrative about conversion from Judaism to Christianity.²¹

I agree with him in part. I do not think we should read this text as a story about conversion. As I have shown before, there is a thematic discourse that is far more developed than the story aspect of the letter presents. He is also correct about the discourse of hegemonic Christians in the beginning of the fifth century. But I do not see enough of the Jews represented in the story to really agree about the creation of a new concept of religion for them. It seems to me that such a reading accepts too greatly Severus’ discourse and allows Christians to define Jews in a way they themselves would not have recognized. However, it does openly depict the Christians as the ultimate and predestined rulers of the Roman world. As others have shown²², such a totalizing Christian discourse was developing in the Late Antique Roman world.

What remains striking is the ambiguity of the otherness, when “barbarian,” “Jew,” and “heretic” become means of designating someone who is not “us.” The polarities presented, and what is said about the other, provide a coherent vision of the ideology of citizenship. Along these modalities of reasoning, Minorca may prove less exotic than it first appears—less a case apart but rather an example of a new type of Christian imperialism.²³

²¹ Boyarin 2004: 38

²² e.g. Avril Cameron and Peter Brown

²³ Sivan 2013: 130

The lack of significant or accurate details about Jews, the rewriting of their past, and the binary opposition to Christians all point toward an emerging Christian identity and the repression of a Jewish one. “The vision of a universal-imperial Christianity entailed the vanquishing, or at least the silencing, of the bearers of difference.”²⁴

Returning to the issue of ethical judgements about the text, it is obvious that the thematic components of the narrative are far better established than the mimetic ones. The author is firm in his opinions. He creates a world with a definitive moral base that he supports through the narration, action, and dialogue. He carefully leads his audience from the beginning to the conclusion with a path of development which shows the means and importance of conversion of the Jews while at the same time developing a Christian identity that does not include harmonious existence with Jews. Instead, there is no Jewish identity outside of its new location within Christianity. From this perspective, the narrative is successful.

Readers make judgements about texts on their aesthetic as well as their interpretive and ethical value. Aesthetic judgements are based on the synthetic components of the text, namely the audience’s “interest in, and attention to, the characters and to the larger narrative as a made object.”²⁵ These are responses to the artistic quality of the work. Taken as a whole, the *Epistula Severi* is written in the form of a letter. The framing of the letter works well for the manner in which the author presents his narrative. There is a degree of verisimilitude that is built into the design of a letter and the lack of character development becomes more palatable than in some other forms of narration. Severus would not be the first Christian writer to have made use of epistolary genre for that purpose:

It is hardly a revelation to suggest that the letter-form is thought to possess a documentary quality: a vast tradition of modern scholarship has proceeded on this very

²⁴ Sivan 2013: 121

²⁵ Phelan in Herman 2007, p. 211

assumption.⁸³ Nor is it difficult to find a similar attitude among ancient authors.⁸⁴ We might therefore understand Sulpicius' adoption of the epistolary genre as a strategy for staking a claim to truth-telling.²⁶

However, would this letter be convincing to an audience of the time? The format is a little strange. The address to the universal church, for example, is unusual. The practice of letter writing had been remarkably stable up until this period with little innovation in form. "Despite the overwhelmingly traditional forms and language of late antique letters, the influence of Christian ideology nevertheless produced some distinctive innovations on classical practice."²⁷ Changes in form seem to be a specifically Christian style in this time period and writers like Augustine, contemporary to Severus, were known to employ unusual techniques.

It was not until the late fourth century, in the Latin west, that we see the first traces of a deliberate effort to theorize a specifically Christian epistolary practice that is distinct from the inherited classical tradition. Whereas earlier Christian letter writers had merely appropriated the standard language and forms of traditional letter-writing, both Paulinus and Augustine attempted to reformulate the cultural function of letter exchange for the Christian community.²⁸

Given the changes in the Christian practice of letter writing, it is plausible that an audience of the time would not find this letter unusual. And, if we can take documented reception of the letter at Uzalis as proof, the letter was effective in influencing other Christians to rise up against Jews. Thus, it appears that the synthetic elements of the letter were at least appealing enough to an audience not to interfere with the acceptance of the thematic message.

Having analyzed the letter rhetorically, the question remains of what value is such a study to our understanding of the letter itself or the time in which it was written? As Bradbury points

²⁶ Yuzwa 2014: 348 He is discussing Sulpicius Severus' letters about the Life of Saint Martin. His observations about the Sulpicius' use of epistolary genre are appropriate to some of the abnormalities in the letter of Severus as they show how changes in the genre reflected a new Christian concept of letter writing. In his footnotes he writes: "83 Deissmann 1927 has been influential in the study of ancient letters. Rosenmeyer 2001, 5–12 tracks that influence. 84 Cornelius Nepos, for example, writes of Cicero's letters to Atticus, Att. 16.3: 'sunt . . . sedecim volumina epistularum, ab consulatu eius usque ad extremum tempus ad Atticum missarum: quae qui legat, non multum desideret historiam contextam eorum temporum.' "

²⁷ Ebbeler 2009: 273

²⁸ Ebbeler 2009: 282

out, “much work remains to be done on the letter, first, to elucidate its contents, and, second, to set it in the broader context of the social and religious life of the period.”²⁹ Rhetorical narrative criticism allows us to make great strides toward elucidating the content of the letter. Careful inspection of the way in which the implied author constructed his narrative has shown us the discourse behind the story. This, in turn, allows us to make inferences about the narrative audience for whom Severus aimed his narrative and it provides us with an example of the changing social discourse that it sought to embody. Part of this discourse is the creation of new identities for Christians and Jews.

Recent scholarship on the ancient world has mirrored wider academia’s concern with identity and difference. The past fifteen years have seen the gradual development of a more sensitive attitude towards text and image, which are no longer regarded simply as mines of empirical data that will help the classical scholar to reconstruct the ‘reality’ of the ancient world, or as an isolated literary exercise, but rather as dynamic cultural forces that create their own ‘imaginaire’ and meanings.³⁰

Alternative modes of analysis of text provide different insights. Feminist studies, cultural analysis, narrative and post-colonial theories all have different ways to examine text and extract meaning and each has added successfully to the study of the *Epistula Severi*. Rhetorical narrative criticism is important for a text like the letter of Severus because it recognizes that the creation of the text as an intentional act. There is an ethic to the production of the text just as much as there are ethics expressed in the text. When examining the past, the way in which an author composed a text should be viewed as a cultural act reflecting the time in which the writing took place. “Culture as a descriptive, communicative and representative force is articulated through text... What all these texts indicate is that culture and identity are produced performatively as narrative.”³¹ Therefore, the analysis of each text through various lenses provides a deeper

²⁹ Bradbury 1996: 3

³⁰ Miles 2002:2

³¹ Miles 2002: 8

reading than only studying a text through traditional or isolated techniques. At the same time, texts are not meant to be studied in isolation. They should be thoroughly examined on their own with multiple approaches and then compared to other texts to gain a larger picture of the period in which they were created.

This is not to say that each of these texts should be studied in glorious isolation from one another. It is these texts that create knowledge and contribute to an accumulated tradition or discourse which further texts simultaneously gain authority from and add to. Such discourses are at the heart of all constructions of identity (Said 1995: 96)...Through the study of late antique texts it is possible to trace the development of certain discourses relating to different identities.³²

There is still much to be done in studying the *Epistula Severi*. Having moved away from attempts to prove its authenticity, scholars have examined its content more. With this study, the discourse becomes clearer and the identity of Christians and their concept of Jews in this letter have been revealed. Further work now needs to be done to connect it to other documents of the time period which may have similar expression of imperialistic Christian discourse and identity. The letter is clearly a piece of evidence supporting the existence of such a cultural movement. However, how well does the letter fit into the changes that were taking place in the development of Christian epistolography? As Yuzwa states, “It is probably still correct to say that late ancient epistolography remains to some extent “undertheorized,”⁷ and this despite the advances made by recent scholarship.”³³ Comparison between the *Epistula Severi* and other fictional narratives like the letters of Sulpicius Severus could both benefit greatly the study of Late Antique epistolography and further set the letter in the context of the social life of the period, as Bradbury recommends.

³² Miles 2002: 9

³³ Yuzwa 2014: 331 The footnote references Ebbeler 2002.

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